UNTOLD STORIESOF OF

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IN MESOAMERICA

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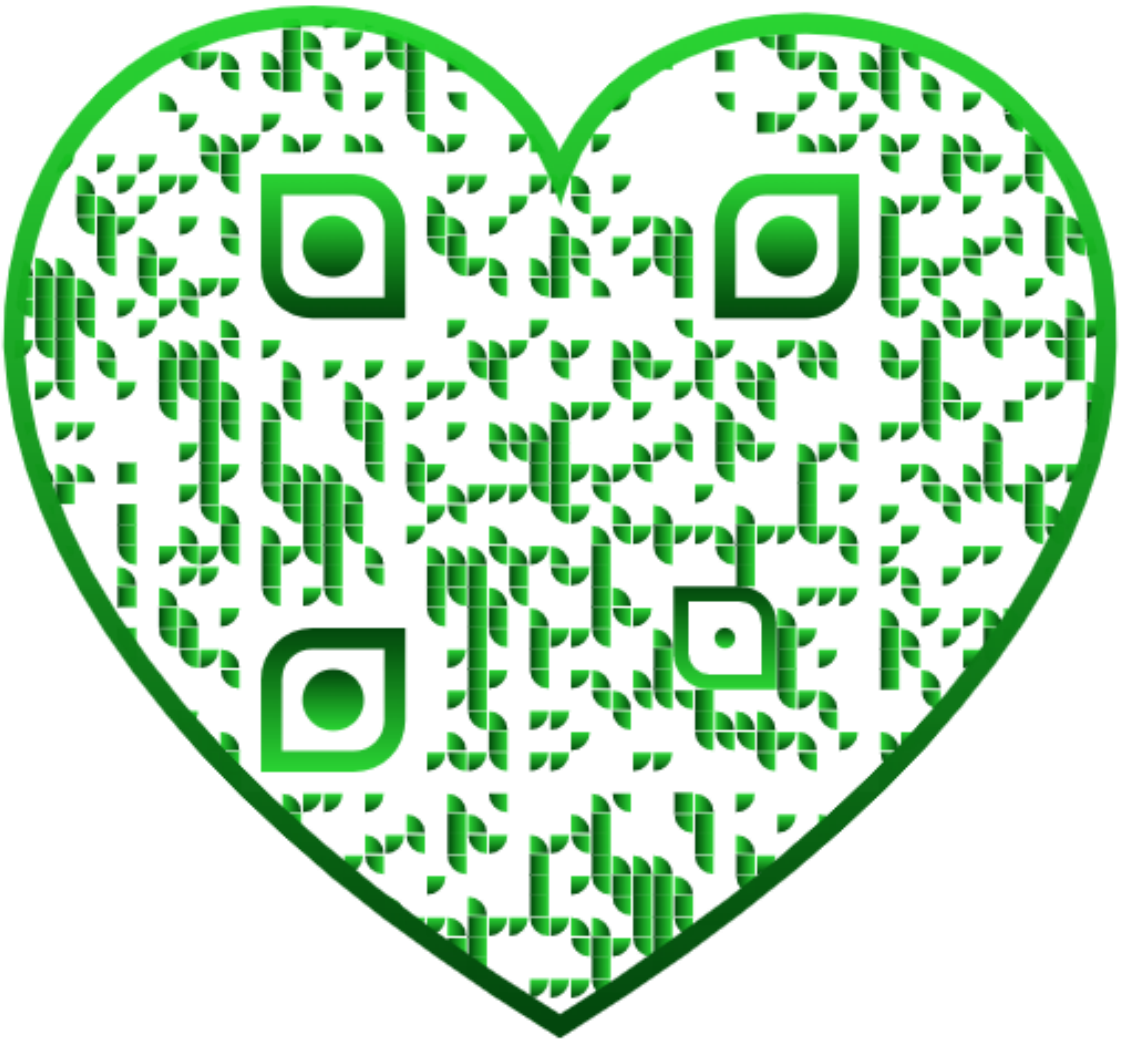
ARDY SIXKILLER CLARKE



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Author's Note

In this age of political correctness, it sometimes requires a writer to explain why certain terms are used in the identification of indigenous groups, even when the author herself is indigenous. The following explanation should suffice.

Maya or Mayan?

I have often been asked: Which is the correct word: Mayan or Maya?

Many writers make mistakes in the use of the two words. There is a definite distinction. For example, the word Maya is used as both a noun and an adjective to describe the people and their culture. The word Mayan is used to describe the language or identify the language but is never used as the proper noun for the indigenous people of Mesoamerica. Maya is also used as both a singular and plural noun. In other words, Maya can refer to a single person or more than one. For example, I might say:

- The men were full-blooded Maya. (noun, plural)
- The Maya people speak the Mayan language. (adj, adj)
- Ninety percent of the Maya still speak Mayan. (noun, noun)
- He told me he was Maya and that he spoke fluent Mayan. (noun, noun)

In Mesoamerica, it is not uncommon for individuals to consider themselves Americans. Although that might come as a surprise to those north of the border, it is commonly held that everyone who lives in North, Central, or South America are Americans.

Americans?

When I refer to the United State of America, I always refer to the USA, which is the common expression in Mesoamerica when referencing the United States. Though many individuals I spoke with in Central America and Mexico

considered themselves Americans, throughout the book you will note that many of the indigenous people self-identified in various other ways.

For example, the indigenous people of Belize referred to themselves as Amerindian or as Red Carib, Yellow Carib, or Garifuna (Black Carib) or, in case of the Maya, according to their Mayan language dialect. In Mexico, indigenous groups often called themselves Yucatecs or Yucatecans, referring to their place of residence on the Yucatan Peninsula, or by their dialect in other parts of the state. In Guatemala, the people were more likely to identify themselves with their distinctive Mayan dialect group, such as K'iche Maya. In Honduras, they most often called themselves Maya or Chorti Maya.

In some cases, they simply referred to themselves as Indios (Indian) or indigena.

UFOs or OVNI?

Throughout Mesoamerica, UFOs are referred to as OVNI. OVNI is the Spanish acronym for Objecto Volador No Identificado. I took the liberty to use UFO throughout the narrative instead of OVNI.

PROLOGUE

This book traces my journey among the indigenous people of Mesoamerica, mainly the Maya, in search of traditional and contemporary stories of encounters with Sky People, Aliens, and UFOs. I organized my trip around the expeditions of John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood, two 19th-century explorers, who did more to introduce the world to the incredible cities of the Maya than any other explorers before them.

I became fascinated with the adventurous duo while in high school. A teacher handed me their first book, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan, and I followed up with their second account, Incidents of Travel in Yucatan. I immediately fell in love with the two explorers and vowed that someday I, too, would follow in their footsteps. Although it took me nearly forty years to realize that dream, I eventually set out to fulfill that promise I made to myself many years ago.

I began my journey, like Stephens and Catherwood did, in the country of Belize, which in 1839 was called British Honduras. Paved roads had most often replaced the trails blazed by the famous duo, though, on more than one occasion, I found the only way to access a site was by walking with guides who opened a trail with machetes. Despite the neglect of many of the sites noted by Stephens and Catherwood, there were others where considerable investment in excavation and restoration had taken place. Copan, Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and Palenque were good examples of restored popular destinations for tourists, adventurers, and scientists.

It took Stephens and Catherwood two visits to realize their goal of uncovering the mysterious cities of the Maya. My journey began during a Christmas holiday in 2003; my last trip was in 2010. In all, I made fourteen trips. Along the way, I visited eighty-nine archaeological sites. Stephens and Catherwood visited forty-four; some of those remain a mystery as to their location even today or have been destroyed in the name of progress. Like Stephens and Catherwood, I often veered from my planned itinerary to investigate legends or rumors. Thus I traveled to areas of Mesoamerica unknown to the two adventurers.

Through their ancient stories many indigenous groups have told stories of beings from the stars. Many Maya myths told stories of the Sky People or Sky Gods that came from the sky, often on a beam of light. Stories of giants, little people, and spirits were universal, yet were only given credence by a few pseudo-scientists. Vine Deloria, noted American Indian author/scholar, wrote in his book Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths that science assumed superiority of thought over the collective memory of humanity. The Enlightenment's insistence on an objective, sterile, and amoral investigation marshaled in a new era that valued supposed rationality. The authority of truth once given to traditional wisdom was relegated to myth and legend. The mystical and spiritual experiences of humanity were regarded as non-trustworthy and interpreted as tall tales because they could not be proven. Even stories that appeared almost universally in tribal cultures across the world were not recognized as legitimate by modern scholars.

Mexico and Central America revealed a rich history of unusual UFO sightings, most of which were dismissed by scientists as hoaxes, space debris, weather balloons, missiles, military planes, or natural weather phenomena. Theories of UFOs and the Maya have thrived, particularly in the last decade. Fueled in no small part by the Maya calendar, the UFO influence over Maya culture appeared in many discussions of this ancient civilization.

Whereas my original intent was to trace the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood through Central America and Mexico, my focus expanded over the years. By the time I made my first trip, I decided not only to re-create the adventurers' journey but to also search out those sites with legends related to Sky People and extraterrestrials. During my trips, I traveled more than 20,000 miles (36,187 kilometers), sometimes retracing a path I had already passed. When there were no roads, I walked. Along the way, I was assisted by villagers, local interpreters and guides, traditional shaman and elders, cultural specialists, historians, and elders. I met with traditional healers and visionaries and entered in ceremonies that required the memorization of chants spoken only to the Sky Gods.

One of the most important considerations for me as a university researcher, trained in both qualitative and quantitative research methodology, was to ensure my qualitative approach did not impact or influence the individuals who related the accounts. Thus every effort was made to avoid leading questions or making inferences.

It has been suggested that two perspectives ("etic" and "emic") can be employed in qualitative research. The "etic" perspective, or outsider's perspective, developed an interpretation of the experiences of that culture by observation. Usually this implied interpreting the culture within the worldview of the observer. An "emic" perspective referred to the way the members of the culture envisioned their world. In other words, the "emic" perspective, or an insider's point of view, allowed for a different perspective. An "emic" researcher avoided judgments about his or her observations or interviews and allowed for acceptance of the behaviors and information observed or obtained. Thus, as an indigenous researcher, I chose to approach the research from an insider's perspective, an "emic" viewpoint. In doing so, I never questioned the existence of the Sky People, Sky Gods, or the traditional myths and legends of the indigenous people, nor was I skeptical of their reported encounters.

Inherent to conducting research among indigenous people was the need to show credibility within the communities. Having a doctorate did not automatically establish a researcher's credibility among indigenous populations in the United States; however, in Mesoamerica, education was synonymous with power and status. Having a prefix of "Doctora" in front of my name was considered an ultimate achievement among the indigenous people I met. Being indigenous added to my credibility. Wherever I went, individuals and groups were interested in my culture and life. Although the indigenous people of Mexico and Belize were far more outgoing and accepting of strangers than the natives of Honduras and Guatemala, acceptance was generally achieved by an introduction from someone believed to be in power, such as a guide or interpreter. In Mexico, the overwhelming majority of my guides, drivers, and interpreters were Maya or at least Mestizo (mixed Maya and European). In the state of Chiapas, my driver was Mixtec, a member of the indigenous Mesoamerican people inhabiting the region known as La Mixteca in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Guerro, and Puebla. Two of my drivers had been illegal immigrants in the USA at one time or another in their lives, but had discovered, at least for them, that being away from family was not worth it. In Belize, my guide was self-identified Red Carib Indian, the Amerindian group that did not intermarry with Africans, who escaped slave ships bound for the USA.

I am not a fluent Spanish speaker; I used a combination of English, Spanish, and interpreters to communicate. An interpreter who spoke the local dialect accompanied me at all formal interviews. Sometimes the driver or guide

served as an interpreter. When an interviewee spoke only Mayan, an interpreter accompanied me. More than half of the interviews were arranged by guides/drivers/interpreters in the homes of those who had experienced the encounters. Others took place simply by chance, or at prearranged hotel settings or at small outdoor cafes. A few of the interviews took place at archaeological sites. All guides, interpreters, drivers, and other professionals were paid a daily fee for their services equal to the established rates plus a 25- to 50-percent honorarium depending on the services. Vehicles and gas were not included in the fees and contracted independently. All interviewees were paid in cash and gifts. None of the participants sought compensation; I chose to pay them in return for their time. I did not advertise that they would be paid. On the contrary, I arrived at the interview with gifts, which is common for visitors to indigenous homes. At the conclusion of the interview, I presented each interviewee with cash, which was the equivalent of $25 USD per hour. All participants were made aware that I was collecting stories and may in the future write a book that may include their stories. Only two individuals requested that their stories not be included, although I listened to their stories and paid them an honorarium, but kept no notes of the interviews.

One of the most important points to remember when among the Maya, regardless of their country or residence, is the Maya of Mesoamerica have a dramatically different history of conquest and colonization, as well as methods of assimilation into a larger nation-state. For example, the Maya of the Yucatan have a far different relationship with the government than those Maya or Indian groups that live in Oaxaca or the state of Chiapas. These differences also extend to the Maya of Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras. It is important to emphasize that the terms such as Amerindian, Indian, Ladino, Mestizo, Indigenous, and Indios are not equivalent across Mesoamerica. Even within the individual countries where various dialects were spoken, I found the terms did not have a stable meaning. In the process of this work, I allowed the individuals to self-identify themselves. I did not seek to blanket identify them nor lump them into a group, as the distinction is rather dramatic.

Several individuals requested anonymity. Therefore, to ensure consistency, names were changed. Most of the participants were people who lived as their ancestors did thousands of years ago. Nearly fifty-five percent of the participants owned cell phones, however, the majority (ninety-two percent) had never used a computer. Sixty-one percent had seen a television; forty percent owned one. None were seeking notoriety, and only a few approached

me about telling their stories. Many of the stories happened by chance or fate. The majority were rural people who farmed the land or worked at various archaeological sites as vendors, tour guides, professional drivers, or hotel employees. More than half of the population ranged from sixty to ninety-nine years old; the youngest was twelve. All participants lived in the countries of Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, or Mexico.

Gender played a role in my research. Unlike men, who spoke freely with me as I was under the protection of indigenous drivers, guides, and interpreters, women were less likely to speak with me. Even when I was able to identify women who would talk with me, it was almost always through the encouragement of a male relative, an extended family member, or someone who was respected by the woman's family. When I was introduced to females who had an encounter, the women preferred speaking to me without the presence of males, unless an interpreter was required. Even then, the interpreters were trusted friends or relatives.

Prior to taking my journey, I had already engaged the services of drivers/interpreters, based upon their indigenous heritage and connections and their interest in UFOs. I wanted to hire individuals who spoke fluent English, Spanish, and an indigenous language most common in the area I traveled. I interviewed all of them, via e-mail and telephone, and completed contracts with them prior to my arrival. On repeated trips to the countries, I continued to engage the same drivers when they were available. Over the seven-year period, I worked with a few other individuals who could more accommodate my needs, but when possible I stayed with those drivers who had a proven track record and were interested in my work.

Most of the interviews took place in individual homes, especially among the women and elders. When visiting homes, if there were female relatives or friends present, I offered cold drinks and gifts for the women and children. On my visits, I carried crayons, sticker books, coloring books, paper pads and pencils, balloons, miniature toys (especially Matchbox cars and trucks), Beanie Babies, and sweet treats. Huckleberry candy from Montana was a favorite among young and old. The women preferred small sewing kits, lipsticks, and heirloom seeds. The men chose tobacco. Food and drink, especially Coca-Cola, was welcomed by the interviewees where sharing and eating together was a widespread practice even among the poorest of families. In villages with small local markets, ice cream treats were a favorite of the children.

During my journey, I walked with people who communicated with Sky Gods and told me of encounters with the space men and Sky People. I met with others who feared the aliens who came from other worlds and avoided them at all cost. Many of their beliefs were grounded in ancient stories and superstitions that had been passed from one generation to another. The fear of devils and curses colored many perceptions of their encounters. These were sometimes viewed within the context of Christian religious doctrines and symbols combined with ancient religious practices and their own superstitions, which brought about a unique interpretation of events.

The number of stories I collected from the countries of Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico varied dramatically. In total, I collected ninety-two stories; half are included in this book. While following in Stephens and Catherwood's footsteps, I visited only one site in Honduras, and that limited my interaction with the Maya. Further, the Maya of Honduras were more reluctant to speak with strangers about UFO encounters. Almost all of my connections in Mesoamerica were arranged by my drivers/guides; some identified friends and relatives who had experienced UFO encounters. In other cases, an innocent introduction or casual meeting sometimes led to a discussion of UFOs and Sky People.

While in Mexico, I often met individuals who told me their stories without an introduction from a go-between. This was perhaps the result of the Maya of Mexico having far more exposure to outsiders, more individuals who spoke English fairly fluently, and more positive experiences with outsiders, especially among those in tourist areas. Many of the stories I collected in Mexico were told by individuals who worked in the tourist industry. As a result they were more outgoing and approachable. In Guatemala, there was a fear of reprisal among the people if they talked with outsiders. This was perhaps a result of the endless violence carried out against the Maya people. In Honduras, the fear of someone in the communities finding out about their experiences was an inhibitor. In Belize, the only English-speaking nation, the people were forthcoming and open about their experiences.

As an indigenous researcher, I walked in two worlds. I came from the safe and secure world of academia and a country where realizing dreams was possible despite one's birth. Many of the individuals I met during my journey lived in a state of survival with little hope of upward movement in their societies. On the surface, we found common ground as indigenous people from the Americas, but as time passed, it was clear that we shared more than a

historical or physical heritage. Stories of giants and little people from the stars, Sky People, and legends about the cosmos all fused to make us a part of something unique to the Americas.

PART I

Walking With the Ancients: Exploring Belize

I arrived for my first trip to Belize on December 14, 2003. Modern-day Belize City, with a population of about 70,000, was nothing like the place that Stephens described. He and Catherwood arrived on October 30, 1839. They saw a thin row of whitewashed houses that stretched along the shore, framed by towering coconut palms. When they arrived on shore, they sunk up to the tops of their boots in the muddy streets. It did not take them long to realize that Belize City was no more than a dirty, tropical village with a few hundred people.

I found Belize City to be a charming place with an old-world atmosphere. Timber dwellings perched high on posts intermingled with buildings of reinforced concrete. There were two streets, originally named Front Street and Back Street (now Regent Street and Albert Street). The city was divided into thirteen sections with quixotic sounding names like Cinderella Town and Lake Independence. The streets swarmed with people, and the roadways were snarled with traffic. Reggae music blasted from every car and shop. British Honduras no longer existed, and in its place was the English-speaking country of Belize.

A few days before Stephens and Catherwood set sail for Belize, the U.S. minister for Central America died in office. Seizing the opportunity, Stephens applied for the job to President Martin Van Buren. Overnight, Stephens was an ambassador, commissioned by the State Department to present himself to the government of the Confederation of Central America. This diplomatic appointment provided Stephens with unparalleled access to Central America. I was not so privileged, but I was fortunate to be under the protection of a spirited, spontaneous, adventurous driver/guide who showed me Belize from an insider's perspective and introduced me to people that few visitors or researchers would ever encounter.

Prior to flying to Belize, I had already engaged the services of Bud E. Martinez. I found Bud E. (Buddy, as he liked to be called) through Belizean friends who suggested five potential drivers/guides who could not only escort me around Belize but could drive me to Copán, Honduras, the first ancient Maya city visited by Stephens and Catherwood. I interviewed all of them, via e-mail and telephone, before deciding. I chose Buddy, a self-professed Red-Carib Indian, a descendant of the indigenous Carib, who was born and raised in a village near Belize City. Buddy, who described himself as "not so handsome, but definitely lovable," had a personality that was outgoing and spontaneous. I recognized him immediately when I saw him waiting for me outside the airport terminal. A barrel-chested man whose upper torso overshadowed his short legs, he reminded me of a football player I knew in college. His black hair curled around a baseball cap. His business card declared that he was "the best damn tour guide in Belize," and before the week was over, I concurred with his advertisement. I also decided he was both handsome and lovable in his own inimitable way. A father of five and, according to him, "the proud survivor of three ex-wives," he was the kind of individual who had never seen a stranger. When combined with his interest in UFOs and his connection with the indigenous community, his affable personality and uninhibited manner proved to be a major asset as we traveled the highways of Belize.

The country of Belize is made up of six distinct districts. My visits were centered around four of those districts: Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek, and Toledo. I made three trips in all, following the footsteps of the 19th-century explorers. The Stann Creek District was the home of the Garifuna, also known as the Black Carib. The Garifuna were descendants of the Carib, Arawak, and West African people. The majority of the Maya lived in the Toledo District, although I interviewed Maya in both the Belize and Cayo districts. Their subsistence, based on ancient agriculture, which required shifting cultivation of small plots of black beans and corn like their ancestors, was still practiced. In addition to their small gardens, they also raised pigs, chickens, cattle, and tobacco. Unlike the Garifuna, they did not assimilate to any great degree with other ethnic groups in Belize. Although the majority were Catholic, or at least accepted some of the symbols and beliefs of the Catholic Church, they often mixed them quite seamlessly with their ancient native religion.

Stephens and Catherwood only spent two days in Belize City before leaving for Copán, which is located in the country of Honduras today. They did

not travel outside the immediate area; instead they used the city as a place to rest from their ocean voyage and to seek out government officials so that Stephens might present his official credentials. On my first trip I stayed five days, which allowed me to visit a few small ancient Maya sites that were unknown to Stephens and Catherwood. Along the way, I interviewed Maya and Garifuna people, who told me about their encounters with UFOs and Sky People. Many of the stories were about sightings of strange objects, but several stories stood out as unusual and unique. In the following chapters, I will share those stories.

Chapter 1
The Backward-Walking People

My first night in Belize City turned out to be one of the most interesting nights of my trip. My driver, Buddy, took me on a prearranged sightseeing trip of the city. Little did I know, this tour would include a five-minute sighting of a UFO hovering over Belize City, a visit to the house of one of Buddy's ex-mothers-in-law, a stopover at the hospital to visit a friend recovering from surgery, and crashing the wedding reception of his cousin. It was at this nuptial celebration, when most of the guests had left, and the discussion turned to the earlier UFO sighting over the city, that I first learned about the "backward-walking people" from the stars.

"My grandfather said he saw them when he was a boy. My grandfather is a Red Carib. He is 102 years old, so they have been around for a longtime," Serena explained. "Their bodies are tall and skinny, but their legs are huge. Their knees allow them to walk backward. We call them the backward-walking people. They have strange heads. When they are walking, their heads flip backward so they can see where they are going." I watched as this tall, angular girl, not yet a woman, mimicked the vision she unfolded. Her cousins laughed as she backed around the room demonstrating the exaggerated movements of the alien creatures she described. She was a striking young woman with long black hair that fell in waves down her back. Unlike her cousins, who were dressed in bridesmaid dresses, Serena (a name she adopted from a movie character) wore designer jeans and an embroidered blouse with a gathered elastic neckline, which allowed her to reveal one shoulder. A mixture of Red-Carib Indian, Spanish, and several other ethnic groups, according to her description of herself, Serena was a beautiful young woman.

"Have you seen these creatures up close?" I asked.

"Not too close. But close enough to know how they walk. I can't describe their faces, but I can tell you they had big heads."

"Do they walk forward?"

“Oh yes. They walk forward, but they also walk backward like they are constantly checking what is behind them.”

“What else can you tell me about them?” I asked.

“They stay away from the villages and cities. I don’t think they want us to know about them. They come from the stars. That’s what I think,” she said.

“Why do you think they come from the stars?”

“Because we always see a UFO when we see them,” she answered.

“Tell me about the time you saw them.”

“I’ve seen them more than once. In those days, Papa [her grandfather] had a small farm in the Stann District. I spent many weeks with him when I was a girl.”

“How old were you when you saw the people who walked backward?” I asked.

“I think I was about six the first time. I thought they were funny. The last time I saw them I was about fourteen or fifteen. They were no longer funny. They made my skin crawl.”

“Can you describe anything else about them?”

“I was never close enough to see exact features. But what I did see was terrifying. I saw their spaceship, too. It was long like the cigars my father buys in Havana. Round and long, but huge. I never saw anything like that before. It had no wings. I don’t know how it flew.”

“What else can you tell me about them?” I asked.

“Papa said their skin was like a snake, but their features were human-like except for their heads, legs, and skin. I should say they were shaped like a human. I was never close enough to see their skin. Papa said that when he was a boy, the men hid women and children from them. There were stories that they abducted women. I never knew if those stories were true, but they scared me when I was little. They scare me now. What if they did abduct women? What did they do with them? It is frightening to think about it. Can you imagine having sex with one of them?” She shivered, shaking her whole body and the bridesmaids, who were as captivated by her story, as I was, giggled.

“Can you tell me anything else?” I asked.

“You should ask my cousin, Bud. He has seen them.”

“Do you mean, Bud, my driver?” I asked.

“The same,” she replied.

On the way back to the hotel, I asked Buddy what he knew about the backward-walking people.

“Sounds like Suzzana—or is she still calling herself Serena?—has been talking,” he said. “It comes from my uncle. He tells stories about these strange aliens that visit the countryside. He says they walk backward.”

“Have you ever seen them?” I asked.

“To tell you the truth, I have seen them. I have seen the UFOs and the giants that come with them—the backward-walking people. I know it is too strange to believe.”

“What can you tell me about them?”

“They are giants. Twice as big as an average man. When I was growing up, the old men talked about them. They came from the stars. They stole women, and the women were never seen again. The old men would speculate about what happened to the women. The believed they were raped and were forced to have their babies. That was the most popular conclusion. I listened to their stories. But one day, I was at my uncle’s house. It was daylight. Not a cloud in the sky. And I saw a UFO. It was a long, cylinder-shaped craft. It glowed orange and then turned gray. I crouched down to make myself small so they would not see me. The craft landed, and I saw a giant creature get out. At first it walked forward, and then all of a sudden, it began to walk backward. Its knees actually reversed, its head pivoted and it walked backward. It is difficult to describe. It rotated its head around so it looked like it was going forward even though it was walking backward.” He stopped for a moment. “I know this doesn’t make much sense. But that’s what I saw. I can’t explain it any better. All I know is that this creature I saw is not of this earth. I called my uncle and he saw it, too. We both said it was best not to talk about it.”

“I’ve never heard of the backward-walking people,” I said.

“You probably won’t again. Sometimes I think it is only my family that knows about them. But if that is the case, they have been targeting my uncle’s farm and his father and grandfather before him. They must come here for a reason. The old men say that it was for women, but I’ve never heard of any disappearances of women in my lifetime. I know these creatures exist. And I know they come in spaceships. That’s all I know, and frankly, I don’t like to talk about it. I think there are things in the universe that we are not suppose to know.”

We pulled in front of the hotel, and Buddy stopped the van. He got out and opened the door for me. He offered no other information, and I expected he would give none. We parted with a promise that he would pick me up the next morning at 9 a.m. Thus ended the first day of my trip in search of Sky People and Stephens and Catherwood.

Chapter 2
A Double on Another Planet

In 2008, a series of UFO sightings, which occurred for several weeks south of Belmopan, the capital city of Belize, made international news. The general consensus among witnesses was that the lights were definitely UFOs especially because they were repeatedly seen in the same area. The observers described the lights as "circular disks" that appeared in groups ranging from four to twelve for a period of more than two hours. Witnesses likened the lights to extremely bright headlights or big balls of light as bright as the moon. These visits became commonplace in Belmopan with the lights appearing approximately every two years. According to local accounts, UFOs had been appearing for more than fifty years.

I was scheduled to visit the village of Hopkins the next day. After years of serving as the director of the Center for Bilingual Education at Montana State University, I wanted to visit Hopkins, a village known as the last place on earth where Garifuna was the first language. The trip to Hopkins turned out to be far more than I anticipated. Along the way, Buddy told me about a fifth or sixth cousin who saw the Belmopan UFOs when he was a toddler and had been abducted repeatedly ever since. The last time Buddy saw his cousin, he was living near Hopkins.

In this chapter, cousin Stephen tells his story.

Buddy told me about the Garifuna people as we drove to the village of Hopkins. "I am a Red-Carib Indian. My people never married with the African slaves who came to our land. The Yellow Carib didn't either. But the Garifuna, they are mixed," he said. "They are a mixture of Carib, Arawak, and West African. The British colonial administration called them the Black Carib, making that distinction over a century ago, and the labels have stuck, just like American Indians where blood is counted. The Yellow and Red Carib are the true Amerindians. The Garifuna are hybrids." It was in Hopkins that the Garifuna people lived off the sea and the rich swamp soil in the area around their village, as they had done for centuries, and still spoke their native

language. We had chosen the "local road" from Belize to Hopkins. This road, which is about ten miles inland and the shortest route, is avoided by tourists, because it is not paved. According to Buddy, there were many days when the road was impassable.

As we traveled the dirt road, Buddy told me about a cousin of a cousin of a cousin who had witnessed many UFO events. Even more important, he reported that this fifth or sixth cousin had been experiencing contact with space travelers since he first witnessed the UFOs of Belmopan about forty years ago. Despite my previous night's experience with Buddy, who had taken me from private homes to the hospital to a wedding celebration, all unannounced and unexpected, I decided to throw caution to the wind and allow him to take a detour in search of the elusive cousin whom he had not seen in thirty years.

According to Buddy, his cousin, at one time, worked with a farmer's group in Hopkins. He moved there shortly after graduating from the university and remained there, marrying a local Garifuna woman.

Although Buddy wasn't sure his cousin was still working with the farmers, he stopped at the local co-op to find out information about his cousin's whereabouts. We arrived just as the workers were taking their lunch break. Within minutes I saw Buddy walking toward the van with his arm around the shoulder of a man who could have been his twin. I rolled down the window when they approached, and Buddy introduced me to Stephen. "I found him hanging out with the local farmers," he said, as his cousin climbed into the vehicle. Within minutes we were sitting in Innies Restaurant ordering local food and drinking Coca-Colas.

After a half hour of the cousins' reminiscing, I approached the subject of Stephen's encounters. "Your cousin, Buddy, told me that you have a history of encounters with Sky People," I said.

"Yes. I saw my first space men when I was about three. At first I did not know they were from space."

"Was there more than one?"

"Sometimes two came, sometimes four; always in pairs."

"Where was your first encounter?" I asked.

"It was the day after the lights appeared in the sky. My father took me out to watch the lights zip around the sky the night before. The first time I came into contact with the space people was the next day in our garden. I was tending my little garden that my father set aside for me, when white balls of light burst out

of the sky and dropped to the ground around me. Out of the balls of light came these little men. From that moment, I remember nothing, only that they brought me back to the garden. There were four of them. Two were holding my hand and telling me that I was now their friend. I did not understand it at the time."

"Do you think they abducted you?" I asked.

"I was young, not much more than a baby. I wouldn't have understood that concept. I also had a feeling of happiness around these small beings. I remember laughing with them and playing, but I don't know where we were at the time."

"So at what time did you realize they were aliens?" I asked.

"Probably when I was about nine or ten. Although they came into the garden several times over the years, it was not until I was about nine or ten that I became aware that they were taking me aboard their space ship. As time passed, I had recurring strange experiences with the space travelers. Sometimes I entertained my friends with stories about a boy who traveled into space. They didn't know they were true. But it wasn't until I became a teenager that I fully understood my experiences. By then it was too late."

"What do you mean, it was too late?" I asked.

"I had been chosen as a three-year-old to be a part of an experiment. By that time I understood what was happening. They had recorded everything about me. I could not escape them. Maybe when I was three, I could have been saved from this repeated interruption of my life, but I never told anyone. They told me it was our secret."

"Are you saying that the Star People told you it was a secret?"

"Yes."

"By the time you were a teenager, did you consider your experience negative?"

"I wouldn't call it negative. Sometimes annoying. These space men did not consider the feelings of the humans they chose for their study. It does not seem to matter to them that they were interrupting lives. They underestimated or didn't understand the independent nature of the human spirit. They don't understand when we rebel or are uncooperative. They expect obedience."

"Did you rebel?"

"A couple of times, but it was futile. They have great powers and with a look they can paralyze you. They can make you forget things. I chose not to

fight them. I wanted to remember everything."

"You spoke of a human experiment. Can you explain that statement in more detail?" I asked.

"That's what they do. They often take young children and continue to abduct them through adulthood. They began their experiment by giving me puzzles to play with, and, though I did not know it at the time, they were observing how I put them together. The strategy I used, the time it took, how I sorted objects. All of it was a part of their study. Every move I made. Every word I spoke."

"Can you describe them to me?"

"There were different types. Some looked human, just like you and me. Some were taller and whiter than me. Others only looked a little like a human. They were not in charge, though. Their heads were big and their eyes were massive and evil. They showed no emotion. Sometimes I thought they were robots, but they had skin. It was a strange skin, very wrinkled and scaly. Do you think they create robots with skin?"

"I'm not sure. How tall were they?" I asked.

"They did not reach my shoulders, but if they touched you, you have no energy. They were strong. Once I tried to resist, but it was impossible. They had powers that reached into your soul and made you incapable of resisting—power over my body and my mind. After that, I gave up and accepted the situation."

"Did you ever learn why you were taken?" I asked.

"I found out when I was about nine or ten. They introduced me to my double. That was in 1963, long before human scientists were conducting cloning experiments."

"What did you do when you met your clone?" I asked.

"I taught him about life. When I was sixteen, I stayed on board their ship, and my clone went back to Earth. He stayed there two weeks impersonating me, and no one ever knew the difference."

"So will your clone one day replace you?" I asked.

"No. He is the same age as me, but he was made to live on another planet the space travelers were populating. So I have a double out there who lives on another world. He looks like me, talks like me, and has my knowledge."

"When was the last time you saw your double?" I asked.

"The night I graduated from college. They came to me late that night, took

me on board their ship, and told me that they were finished with me. Another graduation of sorts. My double had learned what he needed to know. He would be a farmer like me on another planet, and I had taught him all he needed to know. They never thanked me. I think it is a concept they don't understand. Because they are superior, both physically and intellectually, they have the right to do as they please with humans."

"Are you angry about what they did?" I asked.

"No. I resented their interference, but I learned so much from them. I have never told anyone this story. I carried it in my heart. At night I tell my children about the boy from the stars who is a duplicate of me and how he lives among the stars. They think I make up stories, but I tell them the truth. When they are older, I will explain it to them. But for the time now, I am content with knowing that there is much more to the universe than just life here on this earth. It gives me hope."

"Why does it give you hope?"

"I look around me and I see poverty and pain. It is comforting to know that there are other worlds with great knowledge. Perhaps someday, humans will become like the star travelers. They will put their efforts into saving people instead of killing them. The Star People do not believe in war, and they have no diseases where they come from. I have hope that it will someday be like that on Earth."

"Now that you can look back on those years, what is your overall assessment of your experience?"

"When I was small, it was an adventure. When I was about nine or ten, I resented their visits. I wanted to be left to my own devices. Then about the time I reached puberty, I looked forward to meeting my double and teaching him things. I felt important and perhaps it was through the influence of the star travelers that I felt the need to go to the university. Who knows? Maybe not, but I think they gave me hope to follow my dreams, too."

Just as he finished his story, the waitress arrived with ereba, a cassava bread made from yucca, grated cassava, garlic, and salt, along with a local fish and hudut, a pounded plantain dish. After lunch, we drove Stephen back to the co-op. Several of the female workers came toward the van. They wanted to meet the USA Amerindian. I got out and shook hands and exchanged kisses. They asked me about my home and about the USA. They wanted to know if I drove a car and if it snowed in Montana. They also asked me if I lived in a

teepee, an idea they had picked up from television. They wanted to know about my native language. For the next half hour, we traded words; I told them the word for common nouns and they gave me the Garifuna equivalent.

"You are a very brave woman," a woman called Sherry said.

"Brave?" I asked.

"To travel alone and to follow your dreams." She embraced me and whispered in heavily accented English, "Go safely. Your dreams give other women hope."

As we said goodbyes to Stephen and the Garifuna women of Hopkins, Stephen suggested that we make a stop at the local shaman's house. "I know he has traveled with the Sky People. I am sure he will talk with you." Despite spending most of the afternoon in Hopkins looking for the Buyei (the Garifuna name for shaman), we eventually returned to Belmopan.

The following day I planned to search for the famous stone woman of Belize, or at least someone who saw her. But for the time being, I felt good about my trip to Hopkins. I not only met an Amerindian who related a story of a world inhabited by doubles of human beings, but I had been reminded by a woman, who had never been outside of the village of Hopkins, how important it was to follow your dreams.

Chapter 3
A Disk in the Sky

In the 1800s, Edward Everett Hale wrote a short story, "The Brick Moon," which was serialized in the Atlantic Monthly, and was the first known fictional description of an artificial floating city in the sky. In his fictional narrative, Hale imagined a brick moon floating above the Earth peopled by individuals of races from throughout the universe who lived and worked together.

In the 1960s, during the height of the space race between the Russians and Americans, scientists suggested that one day, artificial "Earths" with roads and cities would be built in the sky where people would live and work. Along the same lines, futurists drew bases on the moon where families would build cities and raise families. In 1966 Gene Roddenberry, screenwriter and producer, introduced the American public to Star Trek, a TV series depicting the universe of the future. Although we have never realized these cities in the sky, the international space station, where astronauts from many nations live and work together, is the closest actualization of that dream.

Cities in the sky are not new to many indigenous people who tell stories of cities and places where they have been taken in the sky. In many cases, women were abducted by men from the stars, never to be seen again. In some narratives, the women escaped and returned, some with a child who had enormous and unusual powers. A story that circulated when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon came from Navajo country, where an elder reportedly suggested that Armstrong tell everyone hello because he had been there earlier.

In this chapter, you will meet Raul Manuel, an elder who lived in a small Belizean village, who told the story of repeated visits to a place in the sky where people from Earth worked alongside Sky People and other aliens from throughout the galaxy.

I heard about Raul Manuel from my driver, Buddy. "When I was a boy, there was a man in my grandfather's village who claimed that he had traveled on a UFO to a place in the sky that floated above the Earth. He said that at this place, people of all races lived in peace and no one was better or superior to

any one else." I was fascinated by his story and encouraged him to elaborate. "I remember his stories from the time I was maybe four or five. At night we would gather around him, and he would tell us about his trips to the stars. We loved it."

"Is Raul still alive?" I asked.

"He was alive a month ago. He is elderly, but he still entertains children with his stories of a floating city in the sky and how he travels there."

"Was the floating place in the sky a planet?"

"I don't think so. He called it a floating disk in the sky. Hundreds of people lived there and they were all different. Different colors, different races, and different kinds of people."

"Do you think he would talk to me?"

"I'm sure he will. He loves to tell his stories. In fact, he claims he still goes to this floating disk. Strange thing, sometimes he disappears from the village and no one knows where he is. When he returns, he says he has been with his friends in the sky. I remember last year he disappeared for two weeks. His family was upset and rallied the village to search for him. They thought he had wandered off and had fallen and could not get back home. All of the villagers searched for him but did not find him. One night, about midnight, he returned home. Several people saw a bright light that turned the whole village from night to day. They believe a UFO brought him home."

"How can we get in touch with him?" I asked.

"We will go see him now. It is nearby. My grandfather lives in the same village. I will check to see if he is well and able to visit with you. He has a daughter who lives in Belmopan, and I know she wants him to come live with her now that he is getting older. She worries about his disappearances."

An hour after leaving Hopkins, we entered the small village, which was spread out on both sides of the highway. Shacks made of tin and plywood dotted the landscape with an occasional stone home. Dogs lazily moved from the road as the car approached. Chickens fled and small children rushed for their houses. Villagers who were outside visiting with neighbors stopped and stared in our direction. When they recognized Buddy, some waved. A few braver children approached the van, and Buddy slowed and handed them coins. One boy, who was about nine, hung onto the side of the window and refused to let go. He rode with us to Raul Manuel's small house. When we parked, the door opened and an elderly man waved to us. He greeted Buddy

with a warm handshake, and after a short conversation Buddy walked to the van and opened the door.

"He is happy to talk with you and honored that you have come so far. He tires easily due to his age, so if I give you a nod, it is time to leave." Following introductions, the elder invited us to sit in the backyard under the shade of a coconut tree. The young boy joined us and sat at the foot of the elderly man.

"I planted this tree when I was a boy," Raul explained. "It is as old as me. This young man, Miguel, is like me. He loves trees and plants them all over the village."

"Did you plant the other trees?" I asked.

"Yes. I planted all of them. I love trees and flowers. When I was a boy, I would go into the jungle looking for small trees. Fruit trees. Coconut trees. I planted them in people's yards so they would have food. I am related to most of the people in the village. A lot of the original people have moved away like Bud." He reached out and patted Buddy on the back affectionately. "But they always come home. Bud's grandfather still lives here. He always comes home to see his grandfather. He is a good boy. A gentleman. He makes our village proud."

Buddy kept his head bowed as the elder heaped praise upon him, but I knew it was out of humility. "You must stop by and see your grandfather before you leave," Raul said. Buddy respectfully looked at his hands and nodded. Then, the elder turned his attention to me. "But tell me about the trees in Montana. Bud said you are a famous doctor and teacher in Montana and that you are Amerindian and that you teach at a university. I didn't know Indios could teach at universities."

"Yes. I teach at Montana State University. This is our Christmas break."

"I'm so honored to meet you. Look at this woman, Miguel. You need to go to school and become a scientist. Learn about trees and flowers. Protect them. That is what we need in Belize. People who are knowledgeable about trees, don't you agree, Doctor?"

"I agree. You could study botany." Miguel smiled, showing his perfect white teeth. It was obvious that he enjoyed being the center of attention.

"Do you hear that, Miguel? Botany. And I plan to live long enough that I will go to your graduation." As I watched the interchange between Miguel and Raul Manuel, I realized that Raul was far more than an elder in this community; he was the heart of the community. As we sat in the shade of the tree that Raul

had planted, a young woman entered the backyard carrying a pitcher of freshly squeezed orange juice.

"For you and your guests, Grandfather," the young woman said. She wore a long purple skirt decorated with white ribbon and a white blouse with embroidery around the top. Her long black hair fell down to her waist and her bronze skin was flawless. She kept her eyes downcast as she methodically served each of us in glasses that were unmatched but of fine crystal.

"Does it snow where you live?" Raul asked.

"Yes. It snows and gets very cold."

"I would love to see snow. I have never seen snow. Miguel, you must remember, I want you to go to Montana and see snow." The boy smiled and nodded enthusiatically. "Doctor, your university, is it in the mountains?" I nodded. "It must be a beautiful university," he said.

"It is very beautiful. Young people study there from all over the world."

"Remember that, Miguel. Maybe you will go to the University in Montana. It would be a good place for a Mopan Maya boy." He paused for a moment and then turned to me. "Most of the people here will never leave this village. We are Mopan Maya. In Belize there are Mopan and Ketchi Maya. We are more traditional than our Ketchi brothers. If Miguel goes to the University, he will be the first."

"I'm sure that with your guidance, he will go." The elder looked at me and nodded. He picked up his glass of orange juice and held it up in a toast.

"Doctora, I am ready to answer your questions."

"Buddy tells me that you are a space traveler. Could you tell me about your experiences?" I asked.

"I have been a star traveler since I was Miguel's age. That was the first time I went to the stars. I was almost nine years old. I remember because I was worried when I was taken away that I would miss my birthday party. I was born on September 11, 1910. They took me two days earlier. I thought, 'I will never see my ninth birthday.'" He rubbed his hands on his pants and laughed. "Now that I think about it, it sounds foolish. But I was not yet nine and I thought as a child."

"I think it is a normal reaction," I replied. "I know how important birthday celebrations can be."

"That is true. We celebrate life. That is the reason why I worried about my

birthday. I loved birthday parties, and I was afraid I would never see my family again."

"Tell me what you remember of your first abduction."

"Not much. I remember being taken into the sky by a bright light. I was alone at the time, and within minutes, I was in another place. It was a strange place. Metal everywhere. The walls were metal, and everything was a dull gray and cold to the touch. I remember thinking that this must be what it was like to freeze. I was cold, so cold. There were no hammocks, and I wondered where the people slept. They led me down a long hall. A door opened and I walked into an area that was like a forest with trees and flowers. It was hot like my village. It smelled of damp soil and flowers. They led me to two other boys about my age, and we planted trees. The trees were from my village. We planted medicine leaves. I taught the boys how to plant them. We did this for several hours and then I was back to earth and my village."

"In time for your birthday," I said.

"Yes. In time for my birthday and I did not tell anyone what had happened. I told them I got lost and fell asleep. I thought it must have been a dream. It was not until it happened a second and third time that I realized it was really happening, and that I was going to a place in the sky. On the third trip, they took me during the day. I saw the disk for the first time in the daylight. It was like a cowboy hat, a sombrero, but it was silver. It was high above earth. It was so high that the Earth looked like the soccer ball. We were high. Each time I went there, I taught them about plants. I taught them as my grandfather had taught me about our medicine. They encouraged me to point out medicine plants to them in the forest. They would gently dig them up under my guidance, and later I would plant them in their garden in the sky." He paused for a moment and smiled. "They made me feel important."

"Were the other boys human?" I asked.

"They were not Maya. One had slanted eyes. One was dark, almost black. My favorite was a boy with very small hands—almost half my size. His skin was so white and his hair was white. He had green and yellow eyes that changed color with the light. He spoke a language I had never heard, and yet we all understood each other. There were many languages spoken there in the disk, but we all understood each other. It is still the same way today, and I have never understood how that can be. We all speak different languages, we are different colors, but we understand each other."

“Can you describe the disk in more detail?”

“It was like a huge silver sombrero. It floated in the sky high above the Earth. It was lighted but the lights were greenish everywhere but in the plant room. At night, I could look out and almost touch the stars. We were in space but it seemed like we just floated there. We were in no hurry. The disk was circular and there were living quarters all around the outside for the workers. Toward the center, outside the garden, the men who took me worked there. They were scientists, I think. Maybe they studied botany, too. The garden was located along the back side of the disk, away from the place where the leaders worked. At the end of the garden was a room full of beds stacked on top of each other. The children gardeners slept there. I did, too, when I was with them. The garden contained trees and plants from all over the world. There were birds, some I had never seen. A water tank kept the plants alive. Sometimes they sent smaller craft to collect water. They called these craft the ‘water bearers.’”

“How big was the craft?”

“It was huge. There were three levels. At the top were the men who operated city. In the middle level, there was an eating place and a relax place. On the bottom was the garden and resting places.”

“Buddy tells me that you have been traveling in space all of your life. Over the years, did your role change?”

He looked at me and offered more orange juice. “Yes. It did change. When I became a young man, I became a teacher of small children. I worked with scientists teaching them the mystery of the plants they retrieved from the jungles. I showed them how to prepare them. I discovered we had diseases on Earth they had never known, and they had diseases I had never known.”

“Did you ever find out where they came from?”

“They traveled to their planet several times. They took me when I became older. From a distance, it looked like a vacant world. It is far, far away. There are millions of stars in the universe and dozens and dozens of civilizations.”

“Can you tell me about their planet?”

“It was a desert. It was a purple-gray land. There were no trees or rivers. Only dust and rocks. Dust and wind. It was the reason they were interested in plants. They lived underground and tapped deep underwater reserves. At one time, there was a large above-ground civilization, but they were forced to move underground. Despite their advanced knowledge, there were problems

they did not foresee. Artificial light was not like natural light, and a high percentage of their people suffered mental problems. But today that is no longer the problem. Many of their stories were told about life when they lived above ground."

"Did they ever tell you why they went underground and what happened to their planet?" I asked.

"They told me that a series of catastrophes struck their planet. They never explained. Perhaps they did not think I needed to know or would understand."

"Buddy tells me you still go to the disk in the sky. What is your role now?"

"I am an Earth Advisor according to them. I tell the children of life on Earth and about the jungle and the forests. I tell them the old stories I heard from my grandfather, and I continue to teach them about the importance of trees and plants, and how they can feed your soul and your body. The little ones call me Zhantayillawoc." He spelled the word for me, stopping a couple of times, repeating the word, and then spelling phonetically. "In their language it means something like honored grandfather. I like that."

"What is the most amazing thing you saw during your travels?"

"The underground caves where they lived. Their planet is huge. Several times bigger than earth, but it is a desolate world. When they moved underground there were caves so large I could not compare them to anything. There are no seasons there. They control the temperature. They have different sections where people live and tend to the plants. Some places are hot and moist; some are dry and cooler. Some are like the desert. They have hot zones and cool zones, but I never saw snow."

"Can you describe how they lived?"

"They live all together. There is no private property. Everything is owned and given to you by the community. There were couples like we have in marriage. Children were born, but for the first few years they remained in a nursery and couples took turns taking them to their quarters to spend the nights. The whole community raised the children. They did not have a mother and father as we know it."

"What happened when the children left the nursery?"

"After that, they had their own place. Sometimes they would stay with a couple overnight, but it was their choice. They made their own decisions."

"What about men and women? Were their roles defined?" He stopped and

spoke in Mayan to Buddy, who explained my question to him.

"There were no roles specific to men or women like we have. Everyone did a job and both men and women could do it. They spent much of their time working on ways of solving their planet's problems. They hoped one day to live above ground, but until that happened, they were happy where they were."

"Did you notice any physical differences?"

"Their eyes were larger than human eyes. Big, round eyes, mostly black eyes. I never saw blue eyes. A few brown eyes. Their faces were like humans but they had bigger eyes, much rounder."

"Were they smaller than humans?"

"No. They were different sizes."

"Did you recognize any human emotions or characteristics?"

"They liked to have fun. They played games and they swam in a large underground pool. Boys and girls together. No separation. The children were very independent from early childhood. I never saw any fights, no anger, and no jealousy. I never saw drunkenness. I never saw wife beating. They did not show outward affection. I never saw them hug or kiss." Miguel laughed and covered his face with his hands. The elder smiled. "Miguel likes hugs and kisses," he teased.

"What did they eat?"

"Vegetables and fruits from all over the universe. They brought back fruit trees from many planets and planted them there in their underground gardens. Vegetables, too. Their diet was mostly raw. No one ever seemed hungry, and they appeared in good health. They did not age like humans, either. The children liked to touch my skin because it was wrinkled. They say they have never seen wrinkled skin."

"Did you see any animals?" I asked.

"No. The children asked me about animals. I told them about my dog, Hero. They loved to hear stories about Hero." He paused and yawned and looked toward the sky. "They will be coming for me soon. I would love to take you with me, but it is not allowed. They say they only contact humans when it is necessary and that they do not want those who are curious about them. In time, when humans are kinder, they say they will contact them, but not until they stop fighting among themselves."

"What did they use for money?"

“Money in paper form was not used. Gold and precious gems were used but not among themselves. Only to trade with other civilizations.”

“Gold?”

“Gold has universal value. Diamonds and rubies, too.”

“Do they mine gold and rubies?”

“Yes. But not for wealth of individuals. Only for the good of the whole.”

“What do you think will happen when you can no longer go with them?” I asked.

“I am already preparing Miguel to take my place. He has been my student since he crawled. They will take him in my place, but first, he must go to the University. He must learn more so he can help them.”

“Has Miguel ever accompanied you to their space craft?” I asked.

“Not yet, but soon.” He paused again. His head dropped and he fought to stay alert. I looked at Buddy, who indicated with a tip of his head in the direction of the van, that it was time for us to leave.

“There are so many things I would like to ask you, but I am afraid you are getting tired,” I said.

“I generally take a nap this time of day. Forgive me, Doctora, for drifting off. I will try to continue.” I looked at Buddy, who shook his head, indicating it was time to leave. I stood and thanked him for his time. “Promise me, Doctora, that you will return soon to visit me. I have so much to tell you.”

“I promise,” I said. He stood and kissed me on both cheeks. As we left the backyard, I saw Miguel carefully guide the elder to a hammock that was hung in a shaded area under the roof of his house.

Unfortunately, I never saw Raul Manuel again. When I returned to Belize the following winter, I planned to keep my promise, only to discover that three months after we met, Raul died in his sleep. He left a handwritten note that his belongings were to go toward Miguel’s education. As Miguel’s mother cleaned his house, she discovered dozens of bars of gold in a box. A note was enclosed that stated that he was given the gold by the Sky People in payment for his knowledge.

“Were there any markings or identification on the bars?” I asked.

“There were strange markings, but I gave it little thought. Was that important?” Before I could answer, she explained, “I sold them and put the money in the bank for Miguel. I know how important it was to Raul for Miguel

to go to college. I didn't keep anything for myself. I wanted to honor Raul's request. I sent Miguel to boarding school so he could begin his education, but lately Miguel has been disappearing like the old man. I think he goes with the Sky People." When I asked to see Miguel, she told me he was away at boarding school. "The school notified me about Miguel's disappearances, but there is nothing I can do. I told them to lock him in his room at night. They locked him up, but he disappeared anyway. What do you think? Do you think he goes with the Star People?

"Tell me what you think," I said.

"I grew up listening to Raul Manuel's stories. Then when I had children, he told them stories, too. Miguel was my youngest. His father and grandfather had passed and Raul became a substitute for them. Miguel loved the old man. He wanted to be just like him. If Raul really traveled the stars, I am sure Miguel travels there, too. I think it is his fate. Who am I to question fate?"

I often think of the small boy, Miguel, who sat silently adoring the old man and agreeing with every word he uttered. I have not seen Miguel since that first meeting, but some nights, when I look at the stars, I think that Miguel, like Raul Manuel, is probably high above Earth floating in that silver sombrero and taking care of the Sky People's garden.

Chapter 4
Men Who Walked Through Mountains

There is a legend that when the man/god Quetzalcoatl left Tula, he walked to a mountain and entered it, and it closed behind him. There are various accounts throughout the indigenous world of Star Men who meld into solid structures including mountains. In Peru, there are stories of gods who were able to walk through walls to enter another dimension.

In this chapter, you will meet a witness who reports that Star Men often come from space and visit the ancient temples. They have the ability to walk through the solid walls of the temples and disappear inside mountains.

Alexandro Jean was the manager of the small, boutique hotel where I stayed in Belize City. He was a short, stout man with a bucktooth smile and curly black hair that always appeared as though he had been caught in a wind storm. He wore a silver concho belt over his tight, black polyester pants, a cowboy hat, and a long-sleeved, starched white shirt that appeared out of place in the humid weather.

"I hear that you like stories," Alexandro declared as I entered the small hotel lobby on my way to the restaurant. I nodded and he motioned me to the desk. "I have a personal story I can tell you about UFOs," he said in a stage whisper as he glanced around the room as though watching for eavesdroppers. "I work day and night at the desk, but in the early morning hours, there is no one around. Perhaps if you stop by, I can tell you my story."

"How did you know I collect UFO stories?" I asked.

"Nothing escapes me, Doctor. It's my business to know about our guests. Our security guard overheard you talking to your driver. He was curious that you were interested in UFOs. We don't meet too many people with such interest, mostly white men who have no respect. He told one of the housekeepers who was his wife, about what you were doing, and she told my wife, and that is how it got back to me. Words have feet in a small hotel. We like to know all about our guests. I live many lives behind this desk and travel

the world without ever leaving through the lives of my guests. Doctor, your life makes me very curious."

"Why are you so curious?" I asked.

"A woman alone. Traveling through Belize looking for UFOs. That is curious."

"I'm not looking for UFOs, although I must admit, I would be happy to see one," I said. "I am collecting stories about UFOs. I am retracing, as much as possible, the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood, and along the way, I collect stories from indigenous people about their encounters with UFOs. That's my story."

"I see. Stephens and Catherwood, eh? I know them. They are dead dudes. Why would you follow two dead dudes?"

"It's a teenage promise from a long time ago," I said, offering him more information than I had planned.

"I see. You underestimate yourself, dear lady. You are very curious. Few men have tried to follow Stephens and Catherwood. Occasionally I see someone looking for stories about UFOs, but they do not possess the methods needed to get the local people to talk. You, on the other hand, seem to be able to touch people's hearts and souls. I see how everybody talks to you from the child on the street, the housekeeper, the waiter, the beggar. I've observed you. People are curious about you, too. If you run out of people to talk to, come see me." He paused and handed a letter to a guest before continuing. "If you want a true story, from an indigenous man—me—I will tell you a true one that I experienced when I was a young man."

When Buddy dropped me off shortly after midnight the next evening, I made my way to the front desk. Alexandro Jean was sitting behind the counter watching a small TV. He stood when I approached.

"I've stopped by to hear your story," I announced.

Alexandro smiled and showed me to two chairs near a large window that faced the street. "Could I get you some coffee, tea, or a soft drink?" he asked as I pulled out my notebook.

"No. I really don't need anything. I just want to hear your story."

"You are all business, Doctor. So I will keep to business." He sat down, pulled a coffee table closer, and propped up his feet. "I hope you do not mind," he said, pointing to his feet. I shook my head and he began.

“I will start at the beginning. I did not always live in Belize City, but in a rural village about sixty miles from here. I left for Belize City when I was about twenty. My encounter occurred the summer I was eighteen. There were four of us, my friends and me. We grew up together. Albert was with me. He was my cousin. There was my best friend, Javier, and his brother, Jean. There was an abandoned Maya city near our village. It was small and the government never restored it. I think there have been archaeologists working there the last couple of years, but when I was a boy, it was deserted. We often left the village and went there with our alcohol. We could get drunk and no one would stop us. Our mothers and grandmothers did not like us to drink. If they caught us with alcohol, they would beat us.” He paused and laughed about his remembrance.

“Are you telling me you were drunk when you had your encounter?” I asked.

“No. I was not drunk. We went there to drink, but we had not had anything to drink when we saw the space men.”

“Can you tell me exactly what happened?”

“The first thing I remember was the smell. When we approached the site, there was a strange, unfamiliar odor. Jean pointed it out immediately and we all agreed he was right. It was a strange smell. Nothing familiar to us, and as we were discussing what it might be, we came out of the tree canopy into the plaza. That’s when we saw the craft. It was setting in the middle of the plaza.”

“Can you describe it?” I asked.

“It was a long, dull, dark metallic craft. It looked like a tank and at first, we thought it was a tank, but then we saw the space men. They were dressed in gray suits that matched the craft. They were tall and thin and had light hair. They did not wear headgear like modern astronauts. That’s what confused us at first. To tell you the truth, my first thought was that they were Americans and we had stumbled upon some secret operation by the American military. When you live in this part of the world, we always hear rumors about American soldiers carrying out secret missions. I don’t know how much is truth or fiction or a combination of the two.” He paused when the phone rang and excused himself. I heard him call for security, who appeared almost immediately. He directed him to take ice to the lady who had rented the penthouse on the top floor.

“Sorry for the interruption,” he said as he returned to the chair next to me.

“We have guests who never sleep.”

“You were saying that when you first saw the space men, you thought they were U.S. military,” I said, reminding him of his stopping-off point.

“Yes. Part of it was the color of their hair and part was the uniforms. They wore very strange uniforms. They were two-piece. The shirt was like a tunic that came down over the waistband of the pants. The pants were tucked into boots. The strangest part about their uniforms was that when they moved about, the colors changed to match their environment. When they were close to their craft, the uniforms were dark gray to match the craft. If they were near trees, their uniforms became green and blended into the jungle. When they climbed the temple, they were the color of the stone. My cousin, Albert, said it was a military secret, and they wore uniforms to make them invisible to the enemy. We decided that only U.S. soldiers would know how to do that, so we all agreed that this explanation sounded logical.”

Alexandro paused as two inebriated men entered the hotel. They had their arms around each other to steady themselves. When they saw us, they called out to Alexandro and offered him a drink. Immediately, Alexandro moved to the desk and called security. When a short, muscular man dressed in a navy blue uniform with an insignia on the shoulder and a policeman-style hat appeared, the two doubled over in laughter, steadied themselves, and saluted him. The security officer moved forward, took their room key, and ushered them toward the hallway. “Jack will take care of them. They’re harmless. They have been with us for two weeks. They are opening a hamburger franchise here in Belize, and every night they go out and get drunk. And every night, I call Jack and he puts them to bed.” I heard him give directions to Jack in Kriol, a dialect that is spoken throughout the country, and then turned to me again.

“So when did you decide that the men you were observing at the ancient site were not from the USA?” I asked.

“The four of us remained hidden and watched the scene unfolding before us. Alberto suggested we should leave and go get the village men, but Javier thought we should stay and watch. Jean agreed. I did, too, so we stayed. At first, they seemed to be checking their craft. They walked around it, occasionally stopping and recording something in a glowing tablet they carried. After a few minutes they walked toward the temple, but they did not climb the stairs; they walked through the stairs. We were all struck speechless. We could not believe what we had seen. We knew that underneath the temple

was a cave. The four of us had found the entrance when we were boys, but we couldn't walk through the stairs. They were solid stone, but they walked through them like they were not there." He paused momentarily, got up, and returned with two bottles of Coca-Cola. Just as he started to sit down, two men leaned against the large hotel window in front of where we were sitting. He walked to the window and pounded on the glass. The unsuspecting men jumped as though they had been shot out of a cannon. They turned and looked at Alexandro, and let out a volley of curse words in English and Kriol before they moved on. "Sorry, Doctor. That is the reason I must work all night. I must protect the hotel from drunks. I sleep in the mornings and begin again at noon."

"So tell me, what did you do when the strange men disappeared inside the stairs?" I asked.

"We decided to go to our secret entrance and sneak into the cave. We wanted to see what they were doing. We had never told anyone about the cave and for some reason it felt like they were invading our private property. Javier was particularly upset. There were artifacts in the cave and he was afraid they would steal them. So we crept toward the entrance, staying hidden by the foliage until we could conceal ourselves behind some scattered remains of other buildings. That's when they reappeared. We heard them talking but their language was unfamiliar. It was not English. We speak English like the Americans."

"Did they have any of the artifacts?" I asked.

"No, but it seemed to us that they were looking for something."

"How many men entered the temple walls?"

"There were four."

"Were you closer to them at this point?"

"Yes. We could see their faces. They looked normal except they had unusually high foreheads. I think it was because they were going bald because their hair was set back on their head and was thin. We knew these men were not from the USA. They were foreigners. I think it was Alberto who suggested they came from the stars. These were no ordinary humans. As we were coming to that conclusion, they moved to the west. We decided to follow. Behind the main plaza temple, there is a small mountain. It was actually another temple but it was totally overgrown with trees and grass. We watched as they walked through the mountain. We were totally shocked. At this point, Javier decided he was going aboard the craft that was setting in the plaza. He ran toward the

craft. We followed. But just as we entered the edge of the plaza, the strange men reappeared out of nowhere. Like a puff of smoke."

"Do you mean they had the ability to appear and disappear?"

"They must have. They just appeared."

"Did they see you?"

"At this point, yes."

"Did they attempt to communicate with you?"

"No. They disappeared again and it was less than a minute when the craft moved upward and within seconds it was gone. We watched it climb above the trees. It stopped briefly overhead as though examining us, and then they were gone. Zip, zip, zip. Gone." He made a zigzag motion with his hand illustrating the craft's movement.

"You said you felt as though they were examining you? Were there windows or anything distinctive about the craft?"

"No windows. We saw no lights, but it was the late afternoon. The sun was still bright. It was just a feeling. They hovered above us. I assumed they were watching us."

"Did you stay at the site for your drinking party?"

"Jean said it was a sign. We should give up drinking."

"What kind of a sign?"

"A sign from God. He said they could be angels."

"Did you agree?"

"No. They came from the stars and they returned to the stars. I think we scared them as much as they scared us."

"Have you had any other experiences with Star Men?" I asked.

"I have seen UFOs several times. I saw the one last night. Did you see it?" I nodded. "But I have never seen anything like we saw that day."

"Can you tell me anything else about the experience?"

"It was so powerful that we never went back there again. We never found a different drinking place, either. In fact, we never had a drinking party after that. Maybe they were angels," he said laughing. "They sure made us give up our drinking ways."

A day later, I checked out of Alexandro's hotel and moved to Belmopan. As I was leaving, he stopped me in the lobby. "Be careful in your travels. It is a

dangerous world out there, and don't let anyone ever say that you are not a curious woman. You are very curious." He reached out and embraced me, kissing me on my cheek. "Come back anytime, Doctor. We can spend another night together. The next time, I give you the penthouse suite at no extra charge."

"What was that all about?" Buddy asked as I joined him in the van.

"It was about men who walk through mountains," I replied.

The next time I returned to Belize, I stopped at the hotel and inquired about Alexandro Jean. He had moved to Belmopan. The hours at the hotel had taken a toll on his family life and his wife had given him an ultimatum: either he leave, or she leaves. The clerk did not have a forwarding address, so I was never able to reconnect with Alexandro. But I have not forgotten the man who told me about men from the stars who walked through mountains and made him and his friends give up their drinking ways.

Chapter 5
An Endangered Species

There is a natural cave in Belize near San Ignacio in the Cayo District. It is not only a popular tourist destination but also an archaeological site. Inside the cave are six and one-half kilometers (4 miles) of passageways along a resurging stream. Scientists estimate that there are an additional six kilometers (3.7 miles) of passageways as shown by traces at sinking streams. Evidence suggests that the first kilometer (.6 miles) of the cave was used by Maya. Archaeologists have discovered pottery shards dating to 200 CE along with the remains of twenty-eight humans.

Buddy and I stopped for fruit at a vendor stand on our journey through the Cayo District. On that trip we met a local farmer named Gabriel, who spent an hour under the shade of a palm tree telling us about the blue-skinned space giants with enormous skulls. This was not the first time I had heard of blue-skinned aliens.

In this chapter, Gabriel tells his story of blue-skinned men.

"When I was a boy, I always heard rumors and stories of space giants. I grew up in the Cayo District where Barton Creek Cave is located. It is a complex cave with hundreds of passageways where, over time, different visitors and inhabitants, including the Maya and the space giants, lived. My grandfather told me that in his youth, he saw the giants just outside the town of San Ignacio. That would have been in the 1880s, I believe." He paused as a car drove up with a family of eight children who bounded out of the car and proceeded to touch every single piece of fruit on his stand. When his customers left, he returned to the shade of the tree and began again. "My grandfather said everyone was afraid of the giants from the stars. They stole women and sometimes little girls."

"Did he ever describe them to you?"

"He said they were twice the size of normal men; some were taller. They had heads four times that of a regular adult man and feet several times bigger

than men."

"Have you ever gone into the cave?"

"Many times when I was a boy. My friends and I were always looking for something we could sell to the archaeologists who sometimes visited Belize."

"Did you ever find anything unusual that might confirm the story about the space giants?"

"My friend and I once found a strange skull. It was big and heavy. It took both of us to carry it. Now I know it was probably the greatest find of all times in this area, but when I was a boy, I just hoped to sell it to an archaeologist or a museum. We found it in a grave in one of the passageways. Part of it was sticking above the ground and we decided to dig it up. The space giants had a strange method of burial. They buried their dead in a square grave with the bodies sitting upright. When we discovered the grave, only the top of the skull was poking out. We carried the skull back to the village. My grandfather was upset. He said that it belonged to the space giants and if they discovered we had stolen it, they would kill us and all of our families."

"What did the skull look like?"

"It was huge. Not the skull of a Maya. It was the skull of the giants my grandfather had seen. The skull resembled that of a human except it had sockets on the side of the skull as well as the front. The eyes wrapped around the side of the head. My grandfather said we must return the skull to the cave, but when we went back to bury it, there was no evidence of the grave. We searched for hours but couldn't find it."

"What did you do?"

"We took the skull back to the village and reported to my grandfather. I read the fear on his face, but he said nothing. That afternoon, we took the skull into the forest and buried it for safekeeping. That made my grandfather happier. Months later, we heard of a wise man up near the Guatemalan border who knew of such things. We made the journey and took the skull to him. He said it was a space giant, but from the blue kind."

"The blue kind? What does that mean?"

"The blue kind were the blue-skinned giants of the old stories told thousands of years ago. The blue-skinned giants were different because they had eyes in the front of their head and in the sides."

"What did the wise man tell you about the blue-skinned giants?"

“He said they were diminishing in number and that they were becoming extinct. That is the reason they stole women. They were trying to preserve their race.”

“Did they ever return the women?” I asked.

“There was one very old story that my grandfather told me. He said his grandfather told him. One woman actually escaped and returned to Earth with a blue boy. When the boy grew up he fought for his mother’s people. He became a great warrior, but he had other powers, too. They said he could move mountains. He made valleys so the people could farm.”

“Do you believe that story?”

“When I look upon the beautiful valleys, I think of the blue boy,” he said. “I believe it is true.”

“Where is the skull now?” I asked.

“When my grandfather and I arrived in the village, rumors of our mission preceded us. Our presence brought a number of curious onlookers. There was an archaeologist and a number of local men who came around to see the skull. It just happened that among the onlookers was a man in the village who had lost his daughter many years earlier, maybe fifty years or so. The villagers blamed the blue giants on her disappearance. He had eleven sons who went in search of the giants in an effort to rescue their sister. Six of them died in the pursuit. He was a man in pain who had never gotten over his loss.”

“How did the sons die?”

“Not sure. Stories say they were thrown over cliffs by the giants. One was nailed through the heart to a tree. Several different stories.”

“What happened to the skull?”

“The man who lost his daughter was so angry when he saw the skull that he drew his machete and broke it into hundreds of pieces. There was an archaeologist present. He wrestled with him, but the man was so filled with anger, nothing could stop him. So the skull was gone, and my hopes of fame and fortune disappeared.”

“What else can you tell me about the event?”

“They say the blue giants returned one more time to the village. This time, the man who had lost his daughter was ready for them. He was a powerful conjurer, and when they appeared he placed a curse on the giants. The wise ones believe his curse was so powerful that it ended the visits of the giants.

Some say they died off, for they were never seen again. They no longer travel the universe in search of women and little girls."

Another car pulled up and stopped. Gabriel stood and shook my hand. A broad smile crossed his face. "I tell you the truth, Señora. You can do with my story what you like. He moved forward and kissed me on the cheek. He smelled of sweat and overripe bananas. I kissed his cheek in return. "Travel safe, daughter," he said as he turned and walked to his fruit stand. When I climbed in the van, I looked in his direction one more time. He waved to me.

I never saw Gabriel again even though I looked for him on my return trips to Belize. One thing is for sure: I will never forget him. He held in his hands evidence that giants from space existed and once walked the planet Earth. Not only that, they were giants of the blue kind.

Chapter 6
The Insect Man

"Missing time" is a phenomenon that is often reported in connection with UFO encounters. It refers to a gap in conscious memory and can last for several hours with no recall of what occurred during that time period. The memory of what happened during the missing time reported is often recovered through hypnosis.

In this chapter, you will hear the story of Enrique, a hotel worker in Belize, who encountered a UFO on his way to purchase supplies for his employer. Returning four hours late with no explanation other than the encounter with the UFO, the event had caused him personal problems at home.

"I hear you like stories about UFOs," the waiter said as he set a bowl of tortillas in front of me.

"Yes, I collect stories about UFOs."

"I have a story. I get off in forty-five minutes. If you would like to hear my story, I will meet you in the bar." I agreed to meet him later in the hotel lounge. I watched him move to the side of the room, where he kept an eye on all of the patrons in the restaurant. He had introduced himself earlier in the week as Enrique, the head waiter. A short, stout man with coarse, black hair plastered down with hair oil, he ruled the dining room with an iron hand. In the several days I stayed at the hotel, I observed his meticulous attention to detail. He spoke to the other waiters in the local Mayan dialect, and yet he appeared fluent in Spanish, English, and French.

When I arrived at the bar about forty-five minutes later, he stood as I approached. He had chosen two wicker chairs in a corner for privacy. "Tell me, Doctora. Will you make me famous if I tell you my story?" he asked, smiling.

"That depends on whether you want people to know who you are," I replied. "People are skeptics. They will know if you speak the truth."

"I am a devout Catholic. I always speak the truth," he replied. After

ordering the local sangria for both of us, he began his story. “I am K’iche’ Maya. I have worked twenty years at this hotel. I make more money than all the men combined in my village. Yet, sometimes, I think the village men are richer than me. But because of my loyalty to the hotel, I am a trusted employee. I often go to the city to run errands for the hotel restaurant when the owner is too busy to go. I saw a UFO on such a trip.”

“When did the event occur?” I asked.

“Last month. It was very early morning. I left my home about 6 a.m. I wanted to get to the city when the shops opened so I could return to the restaurant before dinnertime. The drive is monotonous. I became sleepy and decided to pull off the side of the road, walk around, and smoke a cigarette. My drive had been uneventful, and I was ahead of schedule.” He paused, fished a cigarette out of a pack in his front shirt pocket, lit it, and took a long drag, releasing the smoke slowly. “The sun was coming up, the air was still, and it was cool.” He paused, sipped from the glass of sangria, and inhaled his cigarette. “I was standing just in front of the van looking toward the south when I saw something out of the corner of my eye. At first I thought it was an airplane and I became frightened. It was very low, and I thought it was going to crash. When it came my way, I realized there were no wings. It was like a big gasoline tank, and as it soared over me, I dropped to my knees for fear it would strike me dead. For several moments, I couldn’t move. I wondered how it could fly without wings.” Enrique paused again when one of the waiters approached him with a question. He excused himself and left the lounge. I looked around at the other tourists. A busload of twenty-something French tourists had arrived at the hotel earlier in the day and it looked as though most of them were sitting at the bar engaged in loud conversation. Several minutes passed before Enrique returned.

“Sorry, Doctor. A problem in the kitchen.” He seated himself across from me again and called for another sangria.

“Could you tell me more about the UFO?” I asked.

“It was a long, tank-like craft. If you have ever seen a gasoline tanker that delivers gas to the stations, it was like that, only about five times as long and three times as round. It was huge. It was bigger than my village if it was stretched from one end to other.”

“What color was it?”

“It was a dull gray. There were a few small indentations near the top. I

thought they were windows, but I couldn't see lights. Maybe they can see out, but we cannot see them," he said. "When I realized there were no wings, I was in shock, but the biggest shock came when it flew by me and it made no noise. A plane would roar but there was nothing, only the wind that disturbed the calmness of the morning."

"Was there anything else you can remember?"

"The strangest thing was that as I was watching it, it seemed to vanish before my eyes and then reappear again. It did this twice. Once when it was flying north to south and then again when it flew south to north. When it came back the second time, it vanished almost right in front of me. That is when I knew for sure it was a UFO."

"Can you tell me anything else about the craft?"

"I decided to hide behind the van. I didn't want to be abducted. I heard they take you and do experiments. I didn't want to lose my job because of a UFO. At the same time, I was very excited. Actually, seeing a UFO is very exciting and I kept thinking, 'They don't even know I'm here.'" He paused and laughed nervously. Enrique took another drink of sangria and offered to refresh my glass.

"Did something else happen?"

"I watched until the craft was out of sight, thinking to myself that they did not know I was there. I returned to the driver's side of the van. That's when I heard what I thought was a car door slam. I turned, because I thought someone else had seen the UFO. That's when I saw two rolling balls of light. They blinded me. I raised my arm to shield my eyes." Enrique lifted his arm to show me how he had covered his eyes. He leaned back in his chair and lit another cigarette from the ashes of the existing cigarette in his hand.

"Do you want to continue?"

"Oh yes. I am just trying to remember every detail. That is important, isn't it?"

"Yes," I replied. "Take your time." I watched as he ate several chips and drained his glass.

"Suddenly, I was aware that the lights were no longer shining. I dropped my arm and came face to face with two creatures who walked out of the balls of light. I call them creatures because that is what they were. Even though they had two arms and two legs, they were not human. They were shorter than me.

[Enrique was approximately 5' 6".] They had funny skin. It looked like the color of these ashes," he said as he pointed to the ashtray on the table. "Somewhere between white and gray. Their heads were pointed at the chin. Their arms and legs were very skinny, making me think they were children, at least at first, but the truth is, they looked like insects. Nothing more than big bugs." He stopped and ate more chips and called for another sangria. "Don't worry, Doctor. You cannot get drunk on sangria in this hotel. Maybe if you drank a barrel. The bartender has orders to water everything down. It has little to no alcohol. I am fully aware of what I am telling you."

"I don't think you are drunk, Enrique. I'm concerned that this conversation may be difficult for you."

"No, no. I want to tell this story, although, unlike you, most of my friends laugh at me. They tell me I fell asleep along the highway and that I made up this story so I wouldn't get in trouble with the boss. That is not true, but the image of these creatures is forever in my brain. I think that if I had met them in the jungle, I would have thought they were some kind of a bug and probably killed them. Chopped their head off with a machete and probably carried them to the village. Maybe even ate them." He laughed at his statement and looked around the bar to see if he had attracted attention.

"Were you late returning from your trip?"

"I didn't make it back for the dinner crowd. The boss was angry. I tried to explain, but he told me that he would fire me if I told that story again. I have six children and a wife, Doctor. I could not take the chance. So I never told him the story again, nor did I talk about it with any of my friends at the hotel. But they heard the story in the village, and they teased me about it. They call me 'the insect man'."

"You said the creatures looked like insects. Can you tell me anything else about them?"

"They were wearing strange suits. They blended with the environment some way. If they stood in front of a bush, they looked like the bush. If they stood in the dirt, they looked like the dirt. Whatever was behind them, they blended. I knew they were aliens, and I ran for the van. That's when the balls of light appeared, and the creatures disappeared. The UFO moved over me and stayed there, a few feet above me. There was a sickening smell and I think I lost consciousness."

"What is the next thing you remember?"

"I was behind the wheel of the van. I had a terrible headache. I was sweating but I was cold. I tried to pray, but I could not find my voice."

"What do you mean, you couldn't find your voice?"

"My throat was sore. I couldn't speak to pray to God. I opened the door to the van and tried to get out, but I was too weak to move. I sat there for a long time and when I finally managed to open the door, I got out of the van and collapsed to the ground. A passing car came by and slowed. They laughed. They thought I was drunk."

"What did you do?"

"I sat on the ground until I was able to pull myself up and stand. I crawled back into the van, and I got out my cell phone and tried to call the boss. When he answered, I could not speak. I drove to the city, picked up the restaurant supplies, and drove back to the hotel. Along the way, my voice came back. When the boss saw me, he was angry. That is when I discovered that I had been gone most of the day. The trip should have taken me no more than six hours. I was gone more than twelve."

"Do you have any memory of what happened to you during that time?"

"None. But I know what I saw, and I swear that I speak the truth." He made the sign of the cross, paused, and lit a cigarette. "Do you believe me, Doctor?"

"Yes. I believe you."

"Would you tell my wife you believe me?" he asked.

"I'm not sure I understand your request."

"My wife thinks I'm crazy. She thinks I have a girlfriend and that I went to see her. She's a jealous woman. She's a simple woman from the village. She knows nothing of UFOs and aliens. But if you told her you believe me, she might think I'm not crazy."

"I will be happy to explain to your wife that I have heard many stories about UFOs, and that yours is not that unusual. I will tell her I believe you."

A broad grin crossed his face. "Thank you, Doctor. But I must warn you: My wife is a very jealous woman."

The next day, I agreed to accompany Enrique to his village after the lunch crowd left. Buddy accompanied me to run interference in case Enrique's wife misunderstood my visit. His home was a small cinderblock house with a tin roof not too far from the hotel. Bougainvillea flowers fell over the fence and were in bloom in coffee cans on the windowsills. His wife was sitting outside

their home in a white plastic chair under the shade of a tree shelling black beans. She stood when we pulled up, brushed off her dress, and stared at the three of us. Four small boys wearing shorts that were too big for them appeared and hid behind her. The oldest broke loose and ran toward Enrique and threw his arms around his legs. Buddy spoke to her in Mayan and she smiled. When I was introduced to her, she took my hand and welcomed me into her home. When I explained to her that I collected UFO stories, she smiled and asked me if I had heard Enrique's story. When I told her I had heard his story and I believed him, a relief came over her face that seemed to allay all of her fears of infidelity. She reached out and hugged Enrique around his neck and kissed him on the cheek several times. She reached for me and shook both my hands and smiled, thanking me profusely. As Buddy and I left, we offered to give Enrique a ride back to the hotel, but he decided to stay home until his shift began two hours later.

I have seen Enrique and his wife and children twice since our first meeting. He still has no recall of what happened to him during his six hours of lost time. During my visits, he and his wife have welcomed two more children. I am the godmother of the youngest, their only girl.

Chapter 7
The Stone Woman of Belize

The name Xunantunich comes from the Mayan word meaning "stone woman." Local legend says that around the end of the 1800s, a young man from the village of San Jose Succotz went hunting. Approaching the ancient city of Xunantunich, he crossed the base of the Castillo. Beneath the base of the pyramid was a cavern and there, standing motionless, was a beautiful statuesque Maya woman, dressed in a long white dress. She had red, glowing eyes. According to the young hunter, she sparkled in the rays of the rising sun. Awestruck by her appearance, the young man threw his gun aside and ran to the village. After telling the people about the woman of stone, several villagers, including the local shaman, went to the site. Arriving at the large mound, they found the mouth of the cave, but the Stone Woman had disappeared. Thereafter locals claimed that the woman has appeared countless times.

A recent account by a local shaman reported that the Stone Woman was seen ascending to a large silver disk that hung over the ancient site. Others claimed that they saw her climb the pyramid and disappear inside a wall. Stephens and Catherwood did not venture to Xunantunich, but I decided to make the trip before leaving for Copán and search for the shaman who saw the UFO.

In this chapter, you will read about the shaman's experience.

Driving the Western Highway, Buddy and I headed to the village of San Jose Succotz. We located the shaman's wife, who told us that her husband was at the ancient site Xunantunich. We took a hand-cranked ferry over the Mopan River to the site. The ancient Maya archaeological site set eighty miles west of Belmopan in the Cayo District. The Guatemalan border was less than a mile away.

Xunantunich was an archaeological site that flourished during the Classic period and survived the Maya "collapse" to remain an important population center until around 1000 BCE. Once at the site, it took only a few minutes before Buddy located the shaman, Albert Beto, who agreed to share his story

with me. He explained that for several weeks, residents of San Jose Succotz had been seeing strange flying objects over the town. The villagers described the objects as circles that blocked the sun. Reportedly, there was a light radiating from underneath the craft, which pulsated from a bright yellow to a blinding blue light. There was no sound emanating from the craft. After several weeks, the sightings had set the community on edge and the people spent much of their time in church.

"Was it during this time that the Stone Woman appeared?" I asked.

"Yes. From the first time she was spotted, the elders talked about a strange flying machine that circled the sky."

"But the first recorded sighting was in the late 1800s. Did those stories originate in the 1800s?" I asked.

"As long as I remember, the elders have said the Stone Woman comes from the sky. She is a Sky Woman or the Star Woman."

"What can you tell me about the most recent event?" I asked.

"It was a Sunday morning," Albert said. "People were headed for church when a craft came over the village at a very slow speed. It was low, so low that I could almost jump and touch it."

"Was there any detail you noticed about the craft?" I asked.

"It was a dull gray. Round. I saw no windows, no wings."

"Did you see the woman, the one called the Stone Woman of legend?" I asked.

"I saw a woman. She was magnificent. She glowed like a star. She was beautiful. I saw her descend from the craft on a beam of light. She stood at the entrance of the pyramid and walked inside the cave. When she emerged, she climbed to the top of Castillo, a beam of light came down, and she entered the craft just as she emerged from it."

"Were you the only witness?" I asked.

"There were several others, but some of them said she walked inside the pyramid and disappeared. I did not see that. But I avoided her eyes."

"Why did you avoid her eyes?"

"She has red, glowing eyes. If you look into them, she has power over you and makes you see what she wants you to see. I didn't look at her eyes and that's when I saw her disappear on a beam of light, and the craft flew away in a blink of the eye."

“What do you think about this event?” I asked.

“For years, there have been sightings. Before my time, my father and grandfather told stories of this beautiful glowing woman. They said she came from the stars, but over the years, people did not tell that part of the story. Some people believed she was a ghost. A few thought she was an angel. Others believed she was the Virgin Mary. I always believed what the elders told me. She was a woman from the stars and finally I know the truth. She was from the stars.”

“How do you explain that the majority of the sightings of the woman report that she was a stone woman?”

“Two things. I thinks she casts a spell on those who look into her eyes. Then I think perhaps she transfixes men with her beauty and they believe no mortal woman could be so beautiful.”

“Are you saying you do not believe the original story that she was a woman of stone?” I asked.

“I don’t believe so. I think the young hunter who first saw her was so dazzled by her beauty that he thought she was a woman of stone. The people from the stars have great powers. More than those of us on Earth. I believe she was a living, breathing star goddess who cast a spell on those who saw her and made them believe she was a stone woman until she was able to carry out her business on Earth.”

“What kind of business?”

“That’s a good question. I have never been able to learn the answer. I have gone into the cavern many times, but have never discovered anything extraordinary, and yet she returns to the same spot every time.”

“Can you describe to me the woman you saw?” I asked.

“She was taller than our women,” he said. “She had black hair that flowed down to the back of her waist. She wore a long white dress with embroidery. I was not close enough to recognize the designs of her embroidery. Her eyes glowed red. She showed no emotion. No anger, no smile, but she was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.”

“Is there a possibility she cast a spell on you?” I asked.

“Perhaps,” he replied, “but I don’t think so. I am convinced her eyes give her power. I avoid her eyes. That way I am not influenced by her. I can see things as they really are.”

After talking with Albert for another few minutes, it was evident that he had nothing to add to his original story. We said our goodbyes and decided to take some time to investigate the ancient site. As I looked upon the Castile, it was not hard to imagine the mysterious woman who came to this site and transfixed the villagers into believing she was a stone woman with the ability to walk through walls and appear on a beam of light. Xunantunich was a magical place, far removed from the modern world.

One day, I plan to go back to Xunantunich to discover if the legend has been updated or if the Stone Woman has made a recent appearance. For now, it remains on my bucket list.

PART II

Walking With the Ancients: Exploring Honduras

Whereas Catherwood and Stephens traveled overland to Copán Ruinas, Buddy drove me there. It took Stephens and Catherwood eleven days to reach their destination; it took us eleven hours with stops for gas, snacks, and baño (bathroom) breaks. It was a long, wending, treacherous, mountain journey from Belize City through San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to Copán Ruinas. Cars and trucks passed without paying attention to the double yellow lines, traffic, horses, chickens, dogs, bikes, or people on the side of the road. Horns blared, accompanied by loud voices of the cars' and trucks' occupants. Men in jeans and straw hats walked along the highway on their way to their small hillside gardens. Fruit stands dotted the highway at every wide spot along the road. Children ran to the road and attempted to stop traffic to sell small items or to beg. The people were poor, the poorest I had seen since beginning my journey. When Stephens made the trip he armed himself and his companions with multiple weapons as a defense against bandits. Apparently, the situation had not changed, and I was warned that travel at night along this highway was a major risk. Bandits prowled the night, and murder was not uncommon.

Once at the hotel in Copán Ruinas, Buddy inspected my room and made sure that my belongings were stowed and safe. We met two hours later for dinner. It was a cool evening, a welcome respite from the heat of the day. The sounds of cars and horns were replaced by the sounds of night birds and frogs. In the restaurant we met a young French couple in need of a ride to Belize. After a few minutes of negotiation, Buddy planned a return trip to Belize with his new clients for the next day. We said goodbye that night as I planned to sleep late the next morning. I would miss Buddy. He had become my friend and protector. He was now a part of my extended family, and I, his. When I returned to my hotel room, I realized that for the first time since my journey began, I was totally alone.

I spent my first two days wandering the village of Copán Ruinas and familiarizing myself with the ancient city of Copán. Unlike in Stephens's day, who reported a village of a few huts, it was a town of about 10,000 people. The streets within the town were steep and made of cobblestone, but a few blocks away from Parque Central, the town square, were dirt roads, ranches, and small farms. The area was quite mountainous with palm, orange, and banana trees everywhere. The days were hot, the evenings cool. Corn fields dotted the landscape along with horses, chickens, and dogs. Although Copán Ruinas had running water and electricity, there were frequent outages of both. Bottled water sometimes became a luxury so, on the advice of Buddy, I brought my own. There were no street names in Copán Ruinas, but any house could be found with the name of the neighborhood or the landlord. Most of the people spoke Spanish or English. Few of the Chorti Maya spoke their native dialect. A private bilingual school begun by a local teacher attracted young, English-speaking teachers from all over the world. English, Spanish, and Mayan languages were taught at the school.

Mud-brick, thatch-roofed huts and small, cinderblock stores with corrugated metal roofs and signs advertising everything from Coca-Cola to Bayer Aspirin could be seen. People gathered in the town square in the early evening when the temperatures dropped. Women sold snacks, children played games and chased each other, men sat and discussed farming and female tourists, while teens slipped away into the shadows for stolen kisses.

Because of the size of the town, an outsider, particularly one who stayed more than a day or two, was already known even if never introduced to anyone. What they didn't know was often made up and added to the local color. Families were close-knit and extended, and news traveled quickly from person to person with gossip being a regular form of entertainment. This made it especially difficult for a researcher. People were reluctant to share for fear that others would learn their secrets. Although many people admitted to me that they had seen lights in the sky and even had encounters, few were willing to share detailed accounts. The majority indicated they had never shared their experiences with close family members, and because everyone knew everyone, they feared ridicule and superstition.

It was difficult for me to leave Copán Ruinas despite those encumbrances. Somewhere between the stray dogs and the temples, the mountains and the butterflies, the bottles of Imperial and the baleadas, I fell in love with the town, the ancient site, and its people. It was a place where traditions and

superstitions confronted modernity at every turn. It was a place of secrets that were kept secret. Although I found the people in the town and the mountain villages friendly, it was difficult to find someone willing to share detailed stories about their encounters with UFOs. Those who did made me promise I would never reveal their identity and I would disguise them in such a way that they could not be recognized.

Despite the lack of the number of stories collected in Honduras, the three presented in this section are unlike anything that I heard in my travels.

Chapter 8
A Hole Through the Heart

Animal mutilations have increased dramatically in Central and South America the past few years. Shepherds from various communities throughout the region report attacks to their herds. Reports vary about the attacker. Most believe it is the action of a natural predator such as wild dogs. In one Honduran village, more than three hundred goats were killed in fifty days, giving rise to questions about the attacker. Some blame a nahual, a shape-shifter, as the culprit. According to legend, the nahual changes its human form for a given time to acquire the form of a chosen animal. The nahual can only transmogrify at night, attacking children, women, or animals. It is said that some people can turn into birds and are endowed with the power of flight.

Some say that they have witnessed animal mutilations in conjunction with UFO sightings. In this chapter, you will read the story of an event that took place on a small cattle ranch near Copán.

After Buddy drove me to Copán Ruinas, I felt no need at the time to hire a guide as the town, Copán Ruinas, and the ancient city of Copán were basically the only sites I planned to visit. Stephens and Catherwood did the same. Every day, after spending the morning at the site, I ended up at a small restaurant in the village for a cold drink and light lunch. When the owner of the café found out that I was from the USA, she invited several of the young women from the village for lunch who had voiced an interest in learning more about the USA and in learning English. As a result, when the sun forced everyone to seek the comfort of shade or a hammock, I went to a local café, ordered up sweet treats and Coca-Colas or tea for the group of young women and held an unofficial English class. I taught them English; they reciprocated by teaching me expressions in Spanish common to their area and not found in language courses.

As I got to know the women by their first names and learn about their families and dreams, I asked them to share with me the folklore or stories of the area. At one point I shared with them my interest in UFO stories. On one

occasion, a woman named Julia told me about the problem her husband, Alonzo, was having with his cattle herd. “Something comes at night and kills them. We do not know what to do,” she said. “Alonzo hired people to watch the cattle, but it does no good. They are killed anyway. Some people say that on each of the nights the cattle were killed, a UFO was seen. Others believe it is a nahual.”

One afternoon, Alonzo showed up at the café. Julia introduced us, walked to the cafe door, and locked it, placing a sign in the window announcing a temporary closing. At first, Alonzo was reluctant to talk to me, but at Julia’s urging he agreed. He took off his cowboy hat and placed it on the chair behind him. His damp black hair fell around his ears. He wore jeans, a white, starched Western-style shirt, and brown leather cowboy boots, which was basically the uniform of the Honduran cowboys.

“I do not know what is happening,” he said. “I found two cattle last week. Both had their eyes removed and their tongues. There was a hole in their heart, but no blood. I have never seen anything like it. It was like something sucked them dry but there were no teeth marks or any indication that an animal was the culprit.”

“Have you called the police?” I asked.

“Even the university people, but no one has an answer. Some say it is a chupacabras, but I do not think so. Chupacabras are vicious. Whoever or whatever is attacking my cattle knows about doctoring. They cut out the eyes perfectly. Like they were trained to do it.”

“Have you seen anything unusual on the nights your cattle are killed?” I asked.

“One of the men I hired to guard the cattle said he saw a light in the sky. I thought it was lightning and did not think about it more. One of the aunties in the village said she saw a UFO, but most people ignore her. She is a bruja,” he said. I knew he was referring to a witch.

“Did you talk to her about what she had seen?” I asked.

“No. We see strange lights often in Copán. Some say the UFOs like this place. Do you think that the UFOs are killing my cattle?” he asked.

“I really cannot say. I am asking you if you think there is a connection.”

He shook his head but did not respond. He stood and picked up his cowboy hat. He spoke quietly to his wife and then excused himself. I did not expect to

see him again.

However, that evening I walked to the plaza. As I found a place to sit and people watch, Julia and Alonzo approached me with two companions. They asked me to join them at a secluded spot.

"My husband would like to talk to you again. He has brought two friends."

"This is Alberto and the other one is Pedro. They work for me," Alonzo began. "I hired them last week to look after my cattle at night. Pedro says he saw a light in the sky around midnight but doesn't remember anything else. Alberto said he saw a spaceship one night, but he did not tell me because he did not want the people in the village to know."

"Why not?" I asked.

"We do not want people to think we are crazy loco or that we are brujos," Alberto explained.

"Father Francis [the local Catholic priest] says they come from the Devil and if we see them and do not run away, we are dancing with the Devil."

"What happened the night that you saw the UFO?" I asked Alberto.

"Nothing. I remember seeing it stand over the field above the cattle. I could do nothing. It was too powerful," Alberto said.

"Too powerful? Can you explain?" I asked.

"It made pin pricks all over my body. Thousands of them. I was in pain. I could not move. They did that to me. I think I passed out from the pain."

"I remember the same thing," Pedro said. "It was like needles sticking in my body. I tried to get away but the pain was so bad I could not walk."

"When did the pain stop?" I asked.

"I don't remember much. I remember the sun coming up and we went home. We didn't know that two cattle were killed. We found out the next evening when we met Alonzo."

"Did you tell him about the UFO?" I asked.

"No. We were afraid he might think we were cursed by the Devil."

"Can you tell me anything else about that night?" I asked. Both of them shook their heads. After they left, Julia sat with me.

"They are both good workers," she said. "I hope Alonzo doesn't fire them. Their families are poor."

I often think of Alberto and Pedro. They reinforced the concept that our worldview is limited to the teachings of our ancestors, family, and environment. Without formal education, we become victims of religion, prejudice, and superstition. Alberto and Pedro were somewhat typical of many indigenous men I met during my travels. They were submissive to their bosses and worked hard. They loved their families. UFOs did not make sense to them, but the battle of good and evil fought in real life or in the stories of the Bible made sense to them. So they explained away their sighting with the teachings of the local Catholic priest and Christianity, sprinkled with a mix of superstition. They were not atypical, nor were they unique in their beliefs.

Chapter 9
The Silver Man From the Stars

About one kilometer (.6 miles) beyond the ruins of Copán, "Las Sepulturas" was connected to the ancient city by a modern stone path. It was the residential area for the ancient city. Ceramics found there date back to 1000 BCE. It is a beautiful, peaceful site, well-maintained and excavated. There I met Luis, an elderly man who told me he lived in one of the Chorti Maya villages that clung to the mountainsides outside Copán Ruinas. As we talked, he told me about the caves that peppered the mountains around the ancient site and about a discovery that he and two of his friends made in one of the caves when they were boys. This is Luis's story.

"We were typical boys growing up in the mountains. We worked hard to help our families and we played hard. We were adventurous youth and dreamed of life beyond these mountains, but we were afraid to leave. We heard stories from the scientists who came here about the outside world. I was born in 1904. I was five years old when Spinden [Herbert J. Spinden, assistant curator of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York from 1909 to 1929] came to Copán."

"So that must mean you are one hundred years old."

"I will be one hundred in two days. For now, I am ninety-nine. My name is Luis Santiago. I have seen many changes over the years at Copán. I worked at this site for nearly seventy-five years. Spinden was the first to hire me. Mostly, I was a runner. I would run to get things for them, carried water to them, brought their lunches to the site. I worked all day for about ten cents a day in U.S. dollars. Spinden said he would give me more money if I learned English. By the time I was eight, I spoke English. I learned fast. He was true to his word and paid me twenty-five cents a day until he left. I worked with the Carnegie scientists who came to excavate and restore the city after that. They paid me more like fifty cents a day because I could speak English."

"That is amazing. You have been involved in this site from the first explorations. You are like the resident historian." He smiled at my comment,

taking it as a compliment as it was intended.

"When I was a boy, few visitors ever came—not like today. I worked at the site helping the archaeologists who came here to excavate and restore the city. It was an exciting time. Since I was one of the few people who spoke English, I was able to make a good living for my family by serving as an interpreter on the side." He stopped and smiled as he remembered the days of his youth. "Those were good days," he said. He began to cough, and I offered him a bottle of water. He accepted it graciously, took a long drink and then another.

"You spoke about a discovery that you made when you were a boy in one of the caves," I said, trying to remind him of why he had stopped me.

"Yes. I was about eleven and twelve at the time. On the weekends when the archaeologists would take off from work, my cousins and I would check out the caves in the mountains. The archaeologists would pay for artifacts if we found them. It was on one of those excursions that we found the silver man from the stars."

"Can you tell me what you mean by that description?" I asked.

"We found a skeleton of a man in a silver suit. His suit was silver from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. All that remained inside the suit was a skeleton. From the size of the suit he was a small man, smaller than me." He spread his hands to reveal the size; the skeleton could have been no more than a meter (3 1/3 feet) tall. "His head was covered in a hard, metallike tube. We found a strange tablet with strange characters on it lying beside him. It was not Mayan writing. We knew the Mayan writing from the stelae. This writing was foreign to us. It was unknown to the archaeologists, too. They had no idea who wrote it. We took our treasure to the archaeologists hoping for a big reward."

"Can you tell me more about the helmet covering his head?"

"It can best be described as a large can. It was that shape. It was attached to the suit and had a hose that attached to the front of the suit. There were different colored buttons on the front of the breast of the suit."

"What happened when the archaeologists saw your discovery?" I asked.

"They were excited. They took it into one of their tents and began examining it. One of them said they had to send it back to the USA immediately. He said it was proof that the Maya had a connection with the stars. That is why I named him the silver man from the stars. I thought it was a good name."

"What happened after that?"

"The next day I saw a box in the tent. I think they packed him up and shipped him to their university. I never saw him again. All of my life I have wondered about the silver man. I am sure that scientists in USA have studied and re-studied him, but they keep it secret. It is proof that aliens exist, don't you think?"

"What is important is what you think," I replied.

"I believe that he was from the stars. I have no proof, but there has been no similar discovery, and he was not dressed as any human I have ever seen. I really regret giving him to the scientists. They only gave us two dollars. But in those days, we were rich."

"Are there stories in the mountains about space aliens?" I asked.

"The wise men told stories when I was a boy about a small race of men who visited Earth and sometimes lived in the mountains for weeks at a time. They bothered no one, and the people left them alone. They could be seen at times, but they avoided the people. They came in silver disks that spit fire and they wore silver suits. I think our discovery was of one who died on one of those visits. They buried him in the cave, and we disturbed his grave site. I will always be haunted by that idea."

"Did you ever tell your elders about your discovery?" I asked.

"No. We were afraid. I think we always knew what we did was wrong. We never hunted for artifacts after that. Our conscience would not let us. For some reason, I think we knew we had given up an important part of our history. Only the scientists who took it know the truth and they are not talking. Your government probably knows, too. I think our government knows, but they do not want to admit it to us simple people, but our people know far more than the governments about the men from the stars."

When I said goodbye to Luis, he promised that, on my next visit, he would tell me more about the men from the stars but, for now, he had a date with his granddaughter, who was making his lunch.

Unfortunately, Luis and I never kept that date. On my next trip to Honduras, Luis had passed. Still, I often think of him. He carried the guilt of what he had done for many decades, but I think he is correct: There are government men who know about the silver man from the stars. They are just not talking about it.

Chapter 10
An Encounter With the Old Ones

Before 1841, few people knew of the Copán Ruinas. In that year, John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood published their book Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán. The duo stayed for thirteen days, Stephens clearing the site and Catherwood drawing the ancient monuments. At the end of two weeks, Stephens left for Guatemala. Catherwood remained alone at the site and continued to record the massive city on paper. Before Stephens left Copán, he purchased the land where the Maya City stood from a local farmer for $50. At the time, Stephens thought he had purchased the place outright, but indications are that the farmer sold him the right to continue to excavate and record the site. In any case, the farmer believed it to be a good deal, as the local people and the Catholic priest considered it a "bad place" filled with supernatural events and strange stones and pagan idols.

For the next century, Copán was rarely visited by travelers. In 1968, however, Swiss author Erich von Däniken published the controversial book Chariots of the Gods, which became a bestseller in the United States and Europe. Von Däniken claimed that ancient astronauts wearing space helmets were carved on stelae (tall, sculpted, stone monument shafts) at the Maya city of Copán. He argued that spacecraft landed long before modern humanity peopled Earth, and that alien astronauts taught the Maya about astronomy and architecture. He believed aliens helped the Maya build their cities and the Maya rulers were the descendants of extraterrestrials.

In this chapter you will experience an astonishing, personal event of the first and third kind that happened at Copán, which would make a skeptic a believer.

I had been in Copán, Honduras, for a week when a housekeeper approached me quietly and said, "They say you are indigena." I looked at the lady who stood before me. She toyed with the hem of her apron and avoided eye contact. Because Copán is so small, news travels quickly from person to person, and after a few days at the hotel, many of the people in town knew who

I was, even though I had never met them.

"Sí," I replied. "USA indigena."

She nodded, accepting my response. She was a short, stout, middle-aged woman wearing the Maya-inspired uniform required by the hotel owners. Her black braided hair embraced her weathered face. I had seen hundreds of women like her since I left Montana—women who were overworked and underpaid and probably the only source of income for their families.

"If you go to the ruins at night, you might see the old ones," she said. "Our priest said you must be indigena or they will not show up." Shocked by her disclosure and trying not to appear too taken aback, I remained silent and attentive. "Ellos solo aparecen de noche," she said suggesting they (the ancestors) only appear at night. "Solo los indígenas los han visto," she continued, indicating that only indigenous people have seen the ancestors.

"Who are the old ones?" She looked confused as I continued. "Are the ancestors… spirits?"

"They are the old ones. The gods. They appear in many forms."

"Please explain."

"Sometimes they come from the sky. Sometimes they come from the jungle. Sometimes they come as lights. I tell you these things because you are indigena. My boss told me you are indigena and that you are an important lady. A smart lady. Our village priest said you would come."

"Please sit," I said, offering her space on the bed where I sat, but she continued to stand.

"Our priest told us weeks ago that you would come. He said that after you come, there will be richness. He said you were here for a good purpose, and that we must share with you the secrets of the old ones. It is the first time he has chosen anyone from the outside to learn our secrets." She got up and opened the door.

"Please wait," I said. "What do you mean the village priest told you that I will be coming? Do you mean the Catholic priest?"

"No, no. No," she said. "I come from a village in the mountains. It is not too far from Copán Ruinas, but traveling there is very difficult. We have no Catholic priest in my village." She pulled back the curtain and looked around the courtyard outside. "I think you say, shaman. While most of the people in Copán are Catholic, we still follow our old ways in the villages. Our priest

had a vision. He said that an indigena woman will come from el norte. She will be kind and smart. She will love the people so much the gods will make the tourists come, and we will have prosperous [sic] again. The tourists will grow."

"Does your priest believe I am that woman?" I asked.

"Everyone in our village believes; even some of my relatives in Copán Ruinas believe, too. You are an indigena woman. You come from the North. You give presents to the children and tips to the waiters. You have a good heart. Everyone says so. My boss said that you are famous person in the USA." As she spoke, I grew more uncomfortable.

"I am not a famous person," I said. "I am a teacher, a professor."

"Tonight, be ready at midnight. My brother, Teodoro, will come for you. He will lead you into the ancient city. There, if you are the woman sent by the gods, you will see the ancients."

"How much does your brother charge for taking me to the ruins tonight?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Nada," she replied. At the moment I was not sure how to respond. She waited for my response. It was obvious the silence between us had become awkward.

"I will wait for Teodoro," I said.

"He will come around midnight."

I found a waiter in the courtyard and asked him to bring some ice to my room. I returned to my air-conditioned space and picked up Stephens's book, reviewing his comments about Copán. I spent the afternoon entering my perceptions and descriptions of the site into my computer, but I could not escape the prophecy of the village holy man. I was familiar with the power of practicing shamans that existed in the indigenous world. I did not take her words lightly. I tried to lose myself in the words of Stephens, but the book only managed to put me to sleep. I woke when loud voices outside my room startled me. A family with three small children had checked into the room next door. I took a quick shower, dressed in a pair ofjeans, and pulled a long-sleeved shirt over my tank top. I unzipped the front pocket of my suitcase and pulled out my cowboy boots. My friend Jan suggested I leave my cowboy boots at home. That night I was glad I brought them.

I rolled up the sleeves on my shirt, wound my wet hair into a bun, secured

it, and walked out into the night air. I selected a table near the open courtyard for dinner. I looked around the courtyard. A lone, well-dressed man, wearing a white cowboy hat and intricately decorated Western boots, caught my eye and smiled. He was looking at my cowboy boots.

"Eat your heart out, Jan," I whispered to myself as I looked over the menu. After a dinner of pollo sudado, a mixture of chicken with potatoes in a tomato sauce, I decided to take a walk. As I got up to leave, the handsome stranger approached, bowed, and kissed my hand.

"Joaquín Lucio at your service, Señora."

"I am pleased to meet you."

He smiled and then pointed to my cowboy boots. "It is not often I see a woman wearing cowboy boots. It is not a common sight in Honduras.

"It is probably more common in Montana, where I live," I responded.

"Sí. Montana. I know the state." "Beautiful Montana. The land of cowboys and Indians."

"Have you traveled to Montana?" I asked as we walked outside.

"I have never been there, but I have seen photos. We had a man who came to Copán from Montana some fifteen years ago. We called him Johnny. He lived in the village and studied the ruins. When he left, he shared all of his belongings with the local people. The villagers tell stories about him to this day. He has become a legend here. I was happy to call him my friend."

"What was his name?" I asked.

"I only knew him as Johnny. I called him 'Johnny de Montana.'" Joaquín accompanied me to the Parque Central, bowed, and took his leave. I stopped at a local pizzeria and bought a bottle of water. I saw a half-dozen English-speaking teachers, who taught at the Mayatan Bilingual School, celebrating a birthday of one of their colleagues. Otherwise, the place was empty. At the gateway to the ruins, the town welcomed a steady flow of foreigners and had come to expect those dollars that visitors brought to the town. It was obvious there were few tourists, but being proclaimed as the answer to a shaman's vision carried a heavy burden, and I was still troubled by the prophecy. I worried that my presence would be a disappointment to the people, and I didn't know how to handle this expectation. After lingering for an hour or so, I walked back toward the hotel. The aroma of spiced meats and fresh tortillas floated on the air. A cool, gentle wind blew through the valley. It felt good after

the sweltering heat of the day. I returned to my room and wrote in my journal.

At midnight, Teodoro knocked at the door. I opened the door and four gold teeth flashed a smile at me. Throughout my travels, I saw men and women with gold teeth. Gold teeth were a sign of wealth among the ancient Maya and it seemed to be so today, but perhaps the only wealthy man in the village was the dentist.

"Follow me," Teodoro said. He carried a lantern and a flashlight. A machete was slung over his back. We headed out of town for the short walk toward the ruins. The night was dark. The farther we walked from town, the louder the night became. Night birds fluttered among the trees. An insect drone throbbed from the floor of the jungle and resonated throughout the night air, adding to the eeriness. Teodoro led me to a well-disguised pathway. We stooped and crawled inside the jungle-blanketed passageway. Once inside, the path opened. Teodoro paused, lit the kerosene lantern, and handed me the flashlight. The path was narrow. The sound of water came up from the river in a low murmur. I remembered that Stephens and Catherwood forded a river following the path their guide opened with a machete, but I was distracted when something brushed my cheek and my thoughts of the adventurous duo vanished. Suddenly, off to the left, I spied two glowing red eyes. Teodoro whispered, "Balam," and I understood it was a jaguar. As we drew closer, it bounded into the forest. He said visual contact of a jaguar was rare and a good sign.

In the darkness I saw a faint light ahead. As we approached, it appeared as a glowing purplish light. At first, I thought someone was in front of us, but when the light divided into several smaller orbs, I realized that it was not another lantern.

"Son las luces de los ancestros," Teodoro whispered as he surveyed the area. He said the lights were the old ones—the ancestors. I thought about the unexplained lights that appeared at ceremonies at home. The elders said that they were the spirits of the ancestors.

Once Teodoro was sure that we were alone, he guided me up the steps of a temple at the center of the plaza. There, in the pitch-black darkness, he doused his lantern and leaned back to relax.

"Ahora, debemos esperar," he told me quietly. "Now we must wait," he said. I leaned back and looked upward toward the heavens. Overhead the a three-quarter moon traveled across the sky. The intolerable white heat of the

day turned into a cool, dark black mystery set with millions of tiny stars. Under these flashing jewels, the night critters came. Bats dipped and swirled overhead while, below, various unknown creatures scurried among the ancient buildings. Neither of us spoke for the next three hours.

When I felt myself dosing off, it happened. "They are here," Teodoro whispered. Then I saw them. Small balls of light flickered around the ancient plaza and playfully danced back and forth. As I sat there transfixed by the scene unfolding in front of me, one light broke off from its gliding antics and moved in front of me. The other lights floated into formation behind him. They hovered there, and then disappeared on the night air. "Usted es una de nosotros," Teodoro said. "You are one of us."

I sat speechless, thinking about what I had seen. While I was lost in thought, dawn came and sunlight flooded the plaza. Suddenly a large, circular, rotating wheel-like craft appeared overhead. I watched speechless as the revolving wheel disappeared toward the east, and the sun appeared in its saffron glory. I squinted my eyes and looked in the direction of the sun, but the craft was gone. The morning mist lifted, revealing the ancient city, but there was no further sign of the flying, gyrating wheel that hovered, just momentarily, over the spot where the balls of light appeared. I looked at Teodoro. He said it was time to go. I followed him blindly, retracing our steps through the jungle but excited and unsure about what had just happened.

"Teodoro, did you see the spacecraft—the UFO?" I asked.

"Sí. The old ones, the ancestors come from the sky. It has been a long time since we saw them. Our priest said you had the power to bring them back to us."

"Teodoro, I have no power. I am a university professor."

"The priest said your visit will restore balance. It had to be a woman from el norte who was unselfish, kind, and good. You are that woman."

"I'm not sure I'm the one the shaman prophesized," I said.

"Oh sí. You are the one. If not, why did the old ones come?"

"Le gustaría regresar esta noche al sitio?" Teodoro asked me if I wanted to return to the site again at midnight. When I told him I was leaving within the hour, I saw his surprise. I explained that a driver was coming for me. When we reached Copán Ruinas, he bowed and shook my hand. "Thank you, Señora. The ancestors have returned because of you. Now my village will prosperous (sic) again."

I walked back to the hotel alone. It was already hot. I imagined the sun a monster swallowing the sky. There were no clouds in the sky, just the white-hot blaze that made me sweat from every pore in my body. I wanted to lock myself in my room, take a cold shower, and write about what I had seen, but when I reached the hotel, Joaquín approached me. Dressed in his black jacket and cowboy hat, he opened his coat, revealing a Montana State University Bobcats t-shirt.

"I wear in your honor, Señora," he said. "Remember I told you about Johnny de Montana who gave away his clothes to the people? He gave me this t-shirt. When you told me you were from the University of Montana, I wore for you." I did not correct him. It was not the first time that Montana State and the University of Montana were regarded as one. Although the Cats and the Grizzlies might not approve, the two universities were regularly confused outside the state.

"I have a t-shirt like that one at home," I declared as he walked me to the main counter of the hotel.

"By the way, Doctora, your driver is waiting for you." He motioned for a man wearing a white cowboy hat and jeans to come forward. The driver wore a broad smile with the whitest teeth I had ever seen. His straight black hair touched the collar of his white, starched, short-sleeved shirt. He bowed slightly as he was introduced. He smelled of cinnamon. "This is Mateo Huerta Ríos. He is the best driver and guide in all of Honduras and Guatemala. I would trust my sister with him; my mother, too. He will take good care of you in Guatemala. In fact, he is Honduran by birth, but he lives in Guatemala. He also speaks perfect English. He is smart, just like the Doctora." I held out my hand and greeted the stranger I had chosen via e-mails and telephone calls to be my guide, teacher, and driver for the next two weeks.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mateo." He smiled and bowed slightly. He was different than what I had imagined. Though he could have passed for much younger except for the sprinkling of white hairs around his ears, he assured me that he held a master's degree in anthropology and history and that he had been born the year that John Kennedy was elected president. His degrees had given him the opportunity to be a headmaster and teacher at one of the secondary schools in Guatemala. During the summers and holidays he drove tourists to earn extra income. He had two children who were married and two at the university. He expected to be a grandfather before the new year. Wearing a

white cowboy hat and Western boots, he stood close to 6 feet tall. His broad shoulders placed strain on the white short-sleeved shirt, making him appear more like a working cowboy than an intellectual. I chose him for his knowledge about Stephens and Catherwood and their journey through Guatemala and Honduras, and for his admitted multiple encounters with UFOs. I had talked with him on the phone, and after several e-mails I decided he was the perfect driver for me on my expedition; he was more than pleased to be my escort.

"It is my pleasure, Doctora."

I excused myself and walked quickly to my room, packed my last items, took one last look around, and rolled my luggage toward the main desk. I placed my remaining lempiras and 20 American dollars in an envelope and asked that it be given to the housekeeper. As I turned to follow Mateo to the van, Joaquín held out his arms and pulled me toward him, planting kisses on both my cheeks.

"The next time you return, you will be our most honored guest."

"Thank you, Joaquín. I will return." I took one more look around and saw the housekeeper, half-hidden by a large palm tree. She smiled approvingly in my direction. I waved to her. As I left the hotel, I saw Teodoro standing in the entrance of a building across the street. I paused for a moment and then climbed into the van. As we pulled away from the curb, Teodoro yelled, "Usted es una de nosotros." ("You are one of us.") I rolled down the window and called to him, "Regresare pronto." He understood; I planned to return soon.

As Mateo left the city limits, he casually asked, "Did you see a UFO last night, Señora? There were reports on TV this morning about a UFO. They said it appeared in the sky and disappeared in the direction of Copán."

I did not reply to Mateo's question. I wanted to savor the encounter I shared with Teodoro at Copán. At the moment, I needed to keep my thoughts of UFOs to myself. Later, I regretted my decision.

PART III

Walking With the Ancients: Exploring Guatemala

With Stephens in Guatemala City searching for governmental officials, Catherwood spent three weeks drawing the ruins of Copán before falling victim to the malaria-carrying mosquitoes. After a brief respite from his illness, he set out to meet up with Stephens in Guatemala City. On his way, Catherwood met a man who told him about ruins hidden in the woods near a place known as Quiriguá, known today at Utatlan. Even though he was sick, Catherwood could not resist and set out for the mysterious city. He stayed there just long enough to make drawings of two stelae (carved stone slab monuments), which turned out to be among the largest built by the Maya. On Christmas Day 1839, Catherwood arrived in Guatemala City and met up with Stephens.

For the next several weeks they traveled through thickly forested mountains, stopping at every small village to inquire about ancient ruins. Leaving Copán, I followed the path of Stephens and Catherwood with my driver, Mateo. Like Buddy, I had contracted with him in a similar fashion, via e-mails and telephone interviews. Using Guatemala City as a base, we retraced Stephens and Catherwood's steps stopping at the villages they had visited and locating the sites where they stopped. Unlike the hardships the two Maya explorers endured, I found the trip to be quite comfortable and enjoyable. After nearly two weeks of visiting ancient sites and collecting stories about UFO encounters, we drove toward the Mexican border and overnighted in the village of Chichicastenango.

The next day we continued our journey and drove to Quetzaltenango, a large Maya city. Catherwood was so intrigued by the city that he took the time to make a panoramic water-color of the scene. Leaving Quetzaltenango, we headed for Huehuetenango, where we stayed overnight. That was the destination where I would meet my driver, Emiliano, who would take me to

Mexico. Mateo was not licensed to drive “tourists” into Mexico, so I contracted with Emiliano to drive me there. Arriving a day late, I was having second thoughts about my choice. When he introduced himself, my fears were not allayed, although during our drive to San Cristóbal, he proved to be an entertaining companion.

The next day, I said goodbye to Mateo, and with my new driver, Emiliano, I crossed into Mexico at La Mesilla. La Mesilla was much different than Stephens’s crossing. It was a town of hundreds of shanties with Indians peddling their wares along the way. Trash covered the streets, and people and cars were everywhere. It was a depressing sight and one not easily forgotten. Stephens took a more direct route into Mexico, arriving in Comitan by traveling over mountain ranges that exceeded 10,000 feet. From there he made his way to Palenque. I, on the other hand, decided to take a road less traveled and took a side trip to San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, where a number of stories about Sky People and aliens had been reported. Once I was in San Cristóbal, Emiliano returned to Guatemala.

Although I had left Guatemala behind, a part of me stayed there. Unlike the people of Honduras, who were less forthcoming about their encounters, I met individuals who shared their stories despite their misgivings. In Guatemala, my driver, Mateo, who shared my interest in UFOs, was able to connect me with interesting individuals with stories to tell. I have included the most memorable in this section.

Chapter 11
The Devil Sent Them

Religiously, Roman Catholicism dominates Mesoamerica today, as it has for centuries. Protestant Christianity is the next largest, distinguishable religious group. These numbers have increased in the last one hundred years due to the influence of Pentecostal Christianity in particular. It has been suggested that the Indians of Mesoamerica are drawn to the Pentecostal churches because of the similarity between Pentecostal spiritual healing and traditional supernatural curing that invokes the aid of divine elements or entities. Although the modern-day Catholic Church shows far more tolerance for Maya spiritual practices, the Pentecostal faith healing and appeal to superstitions are making inroads into the spirituality of the Maya people.

In this chapter you will meet a young man who came under the influence of a Pentecostal group, bringing about a significant change in his life and his worldview.

I met Mateo for breakfast in the lobby at 6 a.m. the morning after arriving in Guatemala. We arrived late in the evening in Guatemala City and checked into the small boutique hotel with six suites. Mateo had made the reservations at the hotel, and, as I learned later, it was owned by his brother, Hernando. Because of our late arrival, I had not taken the time to look around the hotel. Following an early dinner in my room and a luxurious bath in the "largest bathtub in Guatemala," according to my host, I fell asleep within minutes. As I sat at the breakfast table the next morning, I was struck by my surroundings, which I had not noticed the night before.

The hotel was infused with a subtle, sumptuous, colonial elegance. The panoramic terrace and bougainvillea-draped veranda and fresh flowers on the Guatemalan textile tables were a feast for the eyes. Four waiters approached our table. One young man flamboyantly placed a linen napkin on my lap; another placed a bottle of water in front of me, bowed, and backed away from the table; a third brought butter, which was molded into small chickens; and the fourth brought a pot of coffee to the table.

"Whatever you want to eat, whether breakfast, lunch, or dinner, they will make for you," Mateo said. "There are no menus. The hotel management prides itself on catering to the special traveler and is prepared to make any dish their guests might want." He poured coffee into two cups and passed one to me while I retrieved my notebook from my bag. "For us, a meal should be an experience. So time is not an issue. It takes longer to prepare custom meals, but the end result is pleasurable. You get good food and good companionship."

I put away my notebook, looked at Mateo fleetingly, and took a sip of the black Guatemalan coffee. At that moment, I was still tired from the night before and was not interested in discussing food preparation. All I wanted was black coffee, toast, and fruit, so that the two of us could proceed with planning my itinerary. Mateo must have noticed my indifference, because he countered by turning his attention to me. "How did you sleep, Doctora?" he asked.

"The bed was comfortable, the hotel quiet, but I'm still tired."

"I called your room last night, but there was no answer. You must have been tired. There was a lot of activity at the hotel last night."

"What kind of activity?"

"Several of the guests and hotel workers saw a UFO."

"Did you see it?" I asked. He nodded.

While I was chastising myself silently for not answering the phone, Mateo continued: "It was an incredible display. It hung in the air above the hotel for maybe two or three minutes and then disappeared to the west. One of the hotel workers was outside taking a cigarette break when the object appeared overhead. He rushed inside and told the crowd at the bar. Within seconds, everyone was outside."

"I can't believe I missed it. I was tired. I had been up all night when you picked me up yesterday morning. A friend took me into the Copán Ruinas at night. You arrived just as I was returning from the site."

"There were reports of a UFO sighting the night before," Mateo said. He paused and took a sip of his coffee. "Do you remember when I asked if you had seen a UFO in Copán?" I nodded. "It looked like the same craft that was described on the TV about the sighting the night before."

"Can you describe it?" I asked.

"It was circular, but like a brightly lighted wheel. It hovered over the hotel. I would say it covered the whole building. Probably about fifteen meters (50

feet) in circumference. It was like a floating city. At one point it tipped slightly and witnesses claimed they saw human forms inside a translucent area on one side of the craft. I did not see that. Individual blue lights circled the entire craft."

"Did you see windows?"

"Windows, I'm not sure. There was a translucent area that covered about three parts of the craft. But I am not sure they were windows. Maybe indentations. I could see light through them. All of the blue lights gave off an unearthly blue glow. The lights changed as the rotation increased and turned to orange. The lights turned red when it moved away to the east." A young, Maya waiter approached and took our order. When he left the room, Mateo added coffee to my half-empty cup and announced, "That young man saw the UFO last night. He told me he was taken on board the craft." I set down my cup and looked in the direction to which the waiter had disappeared.

"Really?" I asked. Mateo nodded and smiled. "This is astonishing! When I was in Copán, I went into the ancient city at night. I saw a UFO. It was like a rotating wheel. At first, I thought I was dreaming. It was about the same size as you describe. I remember looking at my companion and he seemed to be in a trance. I pinched myself and looked at the craft again, and that's when I realized that I was fully awake and that I had had an encounter." I paused, waiting for some kind of response, but there was none. "Please say something," I said.

"I believe you," he said. "I've had similar experiences at Copán."

"Perhaps I should ask you to tell me about your experiences," I replied.

"We have several days, Doctora. As we get to know each other, I will tell you many things."

"Do you think the waiter would talk to me about his encounter?"

"I will ask." I watched as the young waiter wheeled a cart to our table and carefully placed our dome-covered plates in front of us. In the middle of the table, he placed a bowl with oranges, bananas, and mangoes and replaced the pot of coffee with a fresh one.

"Eduardo, the Doctora would like to hear about your encounter with the UFO." The young waiter glanced at me and immediately looked away. "Please sit down and tell us what happened to you," Mateo said. The waiter looked nervously toward the kitchen. "Don't worry. I will tell Hernando I asked you to join us." Mateo reached over and pulled out the chair next to him. "Sit. Have

you had your breakfast?" Mateo asked. Eduardo nodded and rubbed his hands on his pants anxiously. "Good." He picked up the freshly squeezed orange juice in front of his plate and set it before Eduardo. "Please, tell the Doctora what you told me earlier this morning. Take your time."

"Last night, I was walking home from the hotel. I live about two kilometers (1 1/4 miles) from here."

"What time was it?" I asked.

"It was late. I worked until the bar closed. Then I washed all the glasses and cleaned up after the guests."

"Eduardo lives with his mother and on the nights when the hotel is not too busy, he stays here," Mateo explained. "There is a room that the management has set aside for him, but when the hotel is full, they rent the room and he has to go home to his mother's house. Last night was such a night."

"Where did you see the UFO?" I asked.

"I first saw it when it was hovering over the hotel. I was delivering drinks to the tables and taking orders for the bartender when José [another waiter] came in and said there was a UFO outside. The bar was emptied in seconds." He looked at Mateo. "You were there. You know what happened." Mateo nodded.

"Yes, but the señora does not know. So please tell her your story."

"After work, I started home. It was a very clear night. Suddenly I saw the craft come from the west. It was a large orange thing, shaped like a bicycle wheel. It moved around and around. I think it hypnotized me. I thought at first it was headed away from the city, but instead, it stopped and hovered over my mama's house. I was afraid for Mama. I ran toward the house and just as I came around the bend in the road, I saw it and it saw me." He paused and took a drink of the orange juice. Mateo laid a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"You are doing fine. Please continue," Mateo said reassuringly.

"A bright blue light came down from the bottom of the craft. It was a beautiful sight and I felt very happy. I knew I had nothing to fear from the visitors. It was a strange feeling. When I left the hotel I was very tired. I no longer felt tired. I felt alert, as though I had slept for hours. They told me to be calm."

"How did they tell you? Did they speak to you?" I asked interrupting him.

"I heard their voices. I am not sure. But it was not long before I became

afraid again. It was when the blue light changed to a white light, I got frightened. I couldn't move. I was paralyzed. That's when I felt my feet leave the ground, and although I struggled kicking my feet and swinging my arms, a powerful force pulled me upward and I could do nothing."

"Were you aware that the light was coming from a UFO?" I asked.

"Not at first. When I saw the blue light, I thought it was a 'Jesus miracle.'"

"A 'Jesus miracle'?" I asked.

"Yes. There have been many 'Jesus miracles'. Many people have had them in our village," he said. I looked at Mateo for an explanation of a Jesus miracle.

"'Jesus miracles' have been occurring as a result of the fundamentalist religious movement in the area. Pentecostal preachers have moved into the area. Lately, to the chagrin of the local Catholic priest, a group of homegrown evangelists have begun converting the local people to an evangelical type of Christianity. They are the copycat healers that are like the TV evangelists in the USA. They talk about 'Jesus miracles.' They say they can heal with their hands. The people are superstitious and uneducated, and they want to believe that God can work miracles and healings."

"But I thought most people were Catholic," I responded.

"That was before the evangelical groups began reaching out to the people. They have food giveaways and dinners. The people go to eat and listen to the evangelicals who fill their heads with a different kind of Christianity, like the 'Jesus miracles'. To you and me, it sounds absurd, but to the people of these villages who are both religious and uneducated, this new religion has become a tremendous influence on their lives. In some cases, it has provided comfort and, some say, miracles. It is cheaper to be a Pentecostal than a Catholic. They no longer have to pay for the different ceremonial events. They only have to pay money to the preachers when they have it."

"So tell me, Eduardo, what happened after the light changed to white?" I asked.

"I was taken on board their craft. They showed me around and told me that they loved the Maya people. I was chosen because of my Maya heritage. They said that the knowledge from the stars has always been hidden in the Maya hieroglyphs but they have never been deciphered correctly. So, they have decided to choose a Maya man to teach the knowledge to the world."

“Do you think you are that man?” Mateo asked.

“They said I was the messenger. They said the earth is changing and that a new world will come soon. They said there will be wars and Earth shaking. People will starve because the Earth will burn. We are living in the fourth world, but a fifth world is coming. It is too late to stop it. I am supposed to tell the people to get ready. The four horsemen will come first. They will ride on white, red, black, and yellow horses, symbolizing the four corners of the world and the colors of the people of the world. When these horsemen appear, the fourth world will end and the fifth world will begin.”

I looked at Mateo. I was not sure if he was thinking the same thing that I was, but it seemed that Eduardo had confused biblical revelations with alien beings.

“Did the aliens tell you about the four horsemen?” I asked.

“Yes. And other things,” Eduardo replied.

“What kind of things?”

“I don’t remember. My head is fuzzy. I don’t want anyone to know about this. When I tried to explain it to Mama, she said I was cursed and that the Pentecostals had filled my head with nonsense. She said the Pentecostals were the devils and not the Sky Men.”

“Can you describe the Sky Men?” I asked.

“They are smaller than me.” He held up his arm to about four feet. “They were dressed in white suits and wore masks.”

“What do you mean that they wore masks?”

“They had helmets, like motorcycle helmets, on their heads but their face was like a mask with large goggles. They hid their faces so I don’t know what they look like. If I knew, I might be afraid of them even more.”

“Were you afraid of them?”

“Yes.”

“Eduardo, have you been going to the Church of God in the village?” Mateo asked.

“Yes.”

“Have they told you anything about UFOs?”

“We have UFOs over the village many times. The padre said they were from the Devil. They are here to fool us.”

“Is this the first time you have been taken by the aliens?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Can you tell me anything about the spacecraft?” I asked.

“There were two. The big one was round like a bicycle tire. It was hollow on the inside. It rotated. The smaller one was a circular craft. It came out of the big one.” He picked up my empty coffee cup and placed it upside down on the saucer. “It looked a lot like that,” he said.

“How many aliens were onboard the craft?” I asked.

“I saw four small men and one tall man who was different from the small ones. I think there were more.” Mateo spoke to him in a Mayan dialect and Eduardo responded. “There were passageways that led to other rooms. The inside area of the craft was as big as the lobby of this hotel and the tall one floated around the room like he had wheels on his feet. He was bony with thin white hair. He never smiled or frowned. He never looked at me. He was busy with some instruments. I don’t know what he was doing.”

“Is there anything else that you remember about your abduction?” I asked.

“They said they would return and that they would come for me. My mother thinks the Devil has cursed me. I do not want the villagers to think I am cursed or possessed by the Devil.”

“You are not possessed by the Devil,” Mateo said, laying his hand on the young man’s shoulder. “And, I can assure you that the UFOs are visitors from another planet. They are not devils. So do not worry. The padre at the Church of God is wrong. Do not listen to him. Go back to the Catholic Church, son. Father Pablo will help you.” Eduardo looked at him uncomfortably.

“I am ashamed to look at Father Pablo,” Eduardo responded.

“I will take you to see the Father. You will see that you have nothing to fear. You know that Father Pablo is a good man. He will take care of you.”

“It will make my mother happy.” For the first time, I saw Eduardo relax. “Shall we take him to Father Pablo, Doctora?” Mateo asked.

“Absolutely.” I put the orange from my breakfast order in my purse and walked out with Mateo.

On our way to the van, Mateo stopped at the desk and left a message for his brother, Hernando. “Tell him we are taking Eduardo to Father Pablo. He will be back in a couple of hours.”

We walked to the parking lot. As I waited to climb inside, I looked back at the hotel. The UFO must have been a spectacular sight hovering over the hotel. I made a mental note that I would stay awake that night in case it returned. Even better, perhaps I could talk Mateo into taking shifts with me.

Chapter 12
We Knew Our Way Around the Universe

The astronomy practiced by indigenous people in the Americas is impossible to summarize, as each language and cultural group had such diverse traditions and legends. Certainly, the Anasazi of Chaco Canyon, the Pueblo of New Mexico, and the Chumash of California (all located in the USA), the Inca of Peru, and the Maya in Mesoamerica, among others, all demonstrated an inordinate knowledge of the stars and had in their possessions star maps.

When Columbus set forth on his voyage, the common belief of the day was that the Earth was flat; the Maya knew it was round. They were also aware of the planets Venus, Uranus, and Neptune long before Western astronomers.

In this chapter you will meet a Maya elder who told me about the star map that guided his people to Guatemala.

I met him through my driver. He was reportedly a longstanding friend who happily shared his knowledge with the youth of his village. He was a small man, lean and fit. He was dressed in worn jeans, a tattered black t-shirt, sandals, and a broad-brimmed straw hat. His hands were gnarled and scarred from what appeared to be a combination of arthritis and hard work. He was missing his thumb on his left hand. He was a respected and honored man whose station in life was not based on material possessions but from the knowledge he passed on from one generation to another. He told me he had never owned a weapon, only a machete. He said if the police or the military ever stopped him, he wanted to appear harmless. He met with me and my driver over coffee at a small, out-of-the-way, outdoor family cafe selected by the driver and owned by his cousin, Salvador, who had converted the terrace of his personal residence into an outdoor restaurant.

"The old, old stories tell us that the Maya were guided to this land by the Sky People," the elder said, "but these are not the stories we tell the invaders." He identified himself as Ramiro, but as the evening wore on, he admitted he had selected the name to protect his real identity. "There are those who believe we should not share our knowledge with outsiders, but you are Indios, and so I

tell you, so you may pass this knowledge along to others. I believe the more that people know about our origins and the origins of all people of the Earth, the better prepared we will be when the Sky People return. Still, I will call myself Ramiro." He paused, and took a drink of the black Guatemalan coffee and asked Mateo for a sweet roll, which Mateo picked up at the counter and delivered to the elder. "Mateo tells me you may someday write a book about your adventure in Maya country. It is all right with me if you add my story. It needs to be told." After he ate half of the sweet concoction Mateo had set before him, I asked my first question and waited for Mateo to translate.

"Why do you believe the Sky People chose to place the Maya in Guatemala?" I asked.

"This land, which the world calls Guatemala, was not chosen for us by the Sky People. We came to the land the invaders call Mexico, but when we fled the invaders, we came here to Guatemala and hid in the mountain jungles. The ancient Maya referred to themselves as the children of the Mayab or inhabitants of the Land of the Chosen. This land had everything we needed to survive. The right climate for feeding ourselves. Animals for food and protection. An altitude and terrain similar to our home place. It was perfect for us."

"So are you telling me that the jungle climate of Guatemala was the same as your home planet?" I asked. He nodded when Mateo translated and took another bite of his roll.

"An elder in Honduras told me that the Maya possessed a star map that allowed them to travel the Universe. What, if anything, can you tell me about that?" I asked. I waited as Mateo translated.

"It is true. Our people possessed a star map. We knew our way around the Universe," he said. "The star map was our guide. That is how we got here."

"What happened to the star map?" I asked.

"Lost, burned, destroyed by the invaders or Catholic priests. The invaders [Spaniards] and their priests feared our knowledge about the Universe and our origins. They thought it was evil and rejected it as the work of the Devil. They were such uncivilized men who did not appreciate nor understand an advanced culture like the Maya." He paused for a moment and spoke to Mateo in his traditional Mayan dialect before he continued. "Man always destroys what he does not understand. It is the same the world over."

"So is everything lost today or is some of the past knowledge still known?"

I asked.

"Our chants to the heavens allow us to speak to the Star people even today. There are living Maya who can talk to the Sky People, but it is an ancient practice, alive and well in Guatemala and Mexico."

"Obviously, it is widely known among archaeologists, historians, and other Mayanists that the Maya were great astronomers. Has any of your knowledge about the Universe been proven by modern-day astronomers?"

"Our legends speak to the birth of the heavens. Much of our ancient knowledge has been confirmed by astronomers today," he said.

"Do your young people know these stories?" I asked.

"Only a few of the young know. We choose those who learn the old ways wisely. Most of our young people do not hold to the old stories. The grandmothers have kept the stories for those who really want to know. The Lacandon in Mexico are the real protectors of our knowledge. Their young people listen to the elders, but then they are more isolated than our children."

"Do you believe that the Sky People still come to you when you pray or chant?" I asked.

"The Sky People come to those who believe," he said. "I know the role that the Sky People played in our lives. So they come to me and take me far into space and they tell me things."

"What kind of things do they tell you?" I asked.

"They tell me to practice our chants and pass on our knowledge to those who will listen. They tell us many sad things are about to happen to this earth. They tell us to be ready with our chants and the Sky People will remember us and come for us. We just need to say our chants and they will hear."

"Can you tell me specifically any one thing that they tell you?" I asked.

"They say that one day a great volcano will open under the sea and all the land connecting North and South America will drop into the ocean. As the land sinks, all of the people of these countries will not know where to go. There will be only the water, but the Maya will be taken by the Sky People to the heavens."

"Do you believe that these things will happen?" I asked.

"It will happen very soon, but the people do not listen. Two-thousand twelve will not be the end of the world, only the beginning of a difficult time. The next decade will witness great suffering of the people of the Earth. There

will be signs in the heavens if people will take the time to look skyward, but most are too busy to look. They will miss the signs."

"When you are taken to the stars and the land sinks, will you be returned to Earth, once the destruction is over?" I asked.

"Some of us will return, but others will go to another star to begin a new world. This is what the Sky People tell us," he said.

Later that evening, Ramiro invited me to join him in a prayer ceremony. Mateo and I ventured into the mountains outside of his village, and there on his prayer mount he laid out his corn kernels and bowls. He chanted to the heavens and spoke to the ancestors.

Although I did not travel the Universe that night, I felt myself a part of the cosmos of the Maya people.

Chapter 13
An Alien Hitchhiker

Guatemala has some of the most amazing UFO encounters on record. Especially remarkable is the sheer variety of the sightings, which range from straightforward accounts of flying objects to abductions, landings, and cattle mutilation, as well as contactee accounts and strange beings that emerge from oddly shaped craft.

In this chapter, you will read the story of four young men, three brothers and a cousin, who gave a hitchhiker a ride. The hitchhiker turned out to be an alien.

I met Eliseo, Javier, and their brother, José, at an outdoor cafe. The meeting was arranged by Mateo, who dropped me off at the small restaurant, while he went in search of another possible contact. I recognized the trio immediately from the description Mateo had given me. They could have passed for identical triplets. They were stout, short men with straight black hair and dimples that outlined their perpetual smiles. They wore sleeveless t-shirts exposing their muscular arms. They stood as I approached their outdoor table, and took off their cowboy hats and placed their machetes on the picnic-like table. When I was seated, José walked to the counter and ordered bottled water for the four of us. I couldn't help but notice the old rifles that were poised at their side, but for some reason I felt safe among the threesome. For a moment, I thought I might be in the presence of members of the mountain guerillas, but I disregarded the thought as their contagious laughter and jovial manner made me feel at ease. Mateo had assured me the brothers were all university students and spoke perfect English.

Eliseo, who identified himself as the elder brother, set the stage for the interview. "We were leaving a wedding reception for our sister in Guatemala City. There was me, José, Javier, and our cousin Miguel. We left after everyone else was gone, because we agreed to return some chairs and tables that our sister had borrowed for the reception. As we loaded the back of the van, a stranger approached us and asked for a ride. Thinking he was a guest of the bridegroom, we agreed to give him a lift."

“I drove,” José said. “Instead of following the main highway, I took a service road that led around the city. It was strange because I had never taken that road, and yet I felt compelled to choose that road. We were a few miles outside the residential area when the front tire began to wobble. I pulled onto the shoulder of the road in front of a textile factory. It was very dark. No moon, no light at all. That’s another thing. There were always lights on at the textile factory, but this night it was pitch black. No lights.”

“Let’s go back to why you took an unfamiliar road out of Guatemala City. Who suggested it?” I asked.

“I’m not sure anyone suggested it. For some reason, I knew this was the way I had to go. I don’t know why,” José said.

“What was your hitchhiker doing at this time?”

“That’s another strange thing. All of us—my brothers, my cousin, and me—had to remove the chairs and tables from the back of the van to reach the toolbox so we could fix the tire. At some point, we realized he was gone. He disappeared.”

“Didn’t you think that was strange?”

“It was just another event in that crazy night. Everything was loco that night, but it got crazier.”

“Before you go on, could you tell me about your hitchhiker?” I asked.

“I really didn’t pay much attention to him. When he asked for a ride, I turned briefly and looked at him. He was dressed like everyone else at the wedding: jeans, white shirt, cowboy hat pulled low over his eyes. He was taller than me and skinny. I thought to myself that this guy had never seen a day’s work. He was not like the four of us. We have muscles.” As if on cue, the three brothers showed me their muscles like a group of bodybuilders, and then, as if embarrassed, they collected themselves and looked at me like small boys with their hands caught in a cookie jar.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Not that I remember, but we could go to Miguel’s house. He’s our cousin. He was with us. I’m sure he will tell you what happened that night. He will be interested in meeting you, although his wife will probably get jealous. She doesn’t like him talking to women,” Eliseo said. “We are single so we don’t deal with jealous women.”

“Yeah, and we like it that way,” José added. Again, they laughed like

teenage boys and gave each other nods of approval.

"We will talk about visiting your cousin when Mateo returns, but for now, please tell me what happened after you unloaded your van and found your tools."

"We had a lantern for light. We lit it and found the tools. I started to remove the tire. Miguel helped me remove the lug nuts and José brought the spare. Javier started yelling about a vehicle with bright headlights that was approaching about a kilometer (.6 miles) away. We continued working without paying attention to his warning. I wanted to get the tire changed and get home. Just as I replaced the flat tire with the spare, a light suddenly appeared behind us above the parking lot of the textile factory. The light was no longer like headlights, but it turned into a bluish light that was so bright it lit up the night. I concentrated on tightening the lug nuts, while José, Javier, and Miguel loaded the chairs and table back into the van. I jumped into the driver's seat while Javier jumped in the passenger seat, and José and Miguel opened the back door and fell inside," Eliseo said.

"At this point, did you know it was a UFO?" I asked.

"I'm not sure we said it out loud, but I think I knew it was an UFO, but we just didn't say it. We were scared. When I turned the key in the ignition, the engine failed to start."

"What did you do at this point?"

"José opened the car door and tried to get out of the van, but suddenly, he was paralyzed. We were all paralyzed. That's when the hitchhiker reappeared. He was no longer dressed like the four of us," Eliseo said.

"He was wearing a white one-piece suit, but—the strangest thing of all—he was still wearing the cowboy hat. He opened the door and climbed into the passenger's seat. He told us not to fear. He closed the door and then the van began to move toward the craft. A bright white light fell on the road in front of us and I felt the van move upward. All the time, the stranger is saying that we should not be afraid," Javier interjected.

"Can you describe the craft?"

"I never really saw it. None of us did. The lights blinded us," Eliseo said.

"Did they take the four of you on board the craft?" I asked.

"They took the van, the four of us, and the hitchhiker onboard. Once we were onboard the craft, the doors opened and we were surrounded by four

strangers. They were like humans, but they were not human. They had the strangest red eyes. They pulled us out of the van and with one hand they lifted our feet off the ground and carried us down a long hallway. The lights inside hurt my eyes and I closed them to avoid the blinding pain. We complained about the blinding lights and they lowered them a little, but it did not help much."

"Can you describe these strangers?"

"The tall ones with red eyes were very strong. They could lift us with one hand. Other than the red eyes, they looked like humans, but they showed no expression. They never spoke to us. José struggled against them, but it did no good. They wore light-colored suits, maybe a light blue. I could not be sure. The light hurt. It hurt my eyes. When I complained again, they changed the lights to a greenish glow."

"Can you describe your abductors?" I asked.

"They had light-colored brown hair and big, round bright blue eyes. I had never seen such blue eyes," said Eliseo. The others nodded.

"Did you see other humans on board the craft?"

"After we were placed in the room, two others entered that we had not seen before, along with our hitchhiker. In a calm voice, our strange passenger assured us they meant us no harm. One of the others was a woman, I think. She was taller than the others with longer blond hair. She came forward and pricked my finger and took my blood. She took the others' blood, too. After that, she left the room. A few minutes passed and two different strangers entered the room. They led us down another hallway. That is the last thing I remember until I woke up behind the steering wheel of the van several hours later," Javier said.

"It was morning when I woke up. I saw a sliver of light on the horizon. I looked in the back seat and José and Miguel were there, but I did not recognize them. I had lost my memory. I didn't even know who I was. I did not know where I was, who I was, or where I was going. I tried to wake the others, but they were unconscious. Javier was lying outside the van on the ground. I saw a car coming toward us. I jumped out and flagged it down. I told the driver that I did not know who I was and needed help. He drove away. On my way back to the van, I picked up Javier and put him in the van behind the steering wheel, and I climbed in the passenger's side. I worried that he would get hit by a passing car."

"How did you get home?"

"A policeman came by and took the four of us to the police station. They looked at our papers and discovered our names and address. They took us home and my mother put us to bed. It was several days before we remembered who we were. José remembered first. He said we were abducted by aliens. Gradually our memory returned. My mother thinks we were captured by Devil worshippers, or demons, but we know differently. We were onboard a space craft, and we were led there by the hitchhiker."

"What happened to Miguel?"

"At first, we didn't know, but we found out later, as our memories returned, that the police had taken him home to his wife. We worried about him because his wife could be abusive. We worried that she had kicked him out of his house."

"But he was okay?"

"Yes. She was not speaking to him, though. She thought we were drinking all night with women." They all laughed at the thought, but I could tell from the facial expressions they exchanged that they sympathized with their cousin.

"When you were onboard the space ship, was there anything that you remember about the craft?"

"I only remember the bright lights. It made it difficult to make out anything about the craft. I think these aliens do not see so well because they had such bright lights. I know that our grandfather says he can see much better when the sun shines. He can only read in the sunshine. He has bad eyes," José said.

"Can you remember any other thing? Were there odors, sounds—anything else that you have remembered?"

José said, "No sounds. No odors. Just bright lights."

"I remember a cold mist in one room," Javier said. "It felt like a silent rain and smelled like rain, but I know it was not rain. I also remember that everything was cold that I touched. It was so cold, it burned. The touch was not something I had felt before. It made me shiver."

"I remember a humming sound," Eliseo said. "It was high-pitched. A sound I had never heard before." All eyes turned to José, who said he had no memories. For the next half hour the trio kept repeating the same information they had already told me. I offered to buy their lunch, and they agreed after I suggested to them that it was a goodwill token for their telling me their stories.

During the meal they asked me about the USA. They wanted to know how Indians were treated in Montana. They all spoke of longing to move to the USA even though they knew it was impossible. When Mateo returned, Eliseo suggested that if I wanted to talk to their cousin, Miguel, that Mateo should first ask permission from his wife, which should allay her jealousy.

When we arrived at Miguel's house, we got out. We were greeted by five children; the oldest appeared to be no more than six or seven. I climbed in the back and got out a bag of huckleberry taffy and offered it to them along with crayons and coloring books. The oldest took the presents and disappeared around the back of the house with the others in pursuit. I later saw him dividing the contents, carefully counting out piece by piece as he shared equally with his siblings. Miguel's wife, Sucelly, welcomed us into her home, while Eliseo and Mateo explained to her my reason for being there. When she nodded and smiled, I knew that she was agreeable. We walked through the small, one-room house and joined Miguel in the backyard. Eliseo introduced me.

"I don't know what I can tell you. I am sure my cousins have told you the whole story."

"I would like to hear it from you, if you are willing to talk with me." I saw Miguel glance in the direction of the doorway. Sucelly was standing there.

"They were not friendly. They were evil beings. They were sent by the Devil. They took us without our permission. They did something to our brains so that we would not remember them, but we did. That is what I think. They underestimated the will of Maya men."

"Would you mind telling me anything you remember about that night?" I asked. As Miguel began to tell his story, it was identical to the story told by his cousins, until he mentioned that the four of them had been separated.

"A female took our blood and then another group came into the room. They took each of us down a long hall and into separate rooms. I remember the hallway was not so bright but the walls were barren. They reflected the light and when I touched them they were cold. When they took me into this room alone, they told me to undress, but I refused. That's when the tall men appeared. One held me while the others removed my clothing. I struggled, but all I did was make myself exhausted. Once my clothing was removed, two women and a man came in. I remember feeling very embarrassed. I did not feel comfortable being naked in front of the strange woman. They put a clamp around my neck and around my feet so I could not move. I remember one of the

women came very close to me and told me I would feel no pain and I would not remember anything when it was over. I must have lost consciousness at that moment, because I do not remember anything until the policemen took me home. Sucelly said I slept for three days and when I woke I still did not remember anything. She doctored me a few more days, and then I remembered. I vowed I would remember and I did."

"Your cousins did not mention that the four of you were separated," I said.

"None of them remember," he said, "but I assure you, we were separated. They did things to us, too." He pulled up his ragged t-shirt and showed me a round indentation on his left side about the size of a quarter. "I did not have this before that night. I think they took part of me."

Before leaving Miguel's house, I gave Sucelly a sewing kit, hand cream, and lipstick. Inside the sewing kit, I tucked two $20 bills. Before leaving, she offered us orange juice and Mateo talked with her in Mayan, occasionally stopping to translate.

I often think of the four cousins who told me their story. Though there are skeptics who would disregard their encounter, this was not the first time I had heard from individuals who reported that they had been taken onboard a craft in their vehicles. I have repeatedly been told about the paralysis that accompanied an abduction. It was only the third time, however, that a hitchhiker was involved who was actually an alien. It makes me wonder if this practice is more common than we know. I never pass a hitchhiker without thinking of Eliseo, José, Javier, and Miguel. Even if I am tempted to stop, I drive on.

Chapter 14
The Sky Men of Quiriguá

In the ancient city of Quiriguá, Guatemala, the elders in the nearby village maintain that the city has always been associated with sky beings and, in fact, the ancient city was ruled by members of the "Sky Dynasty." When you examine the history of the site closely, you discover that Cauac Sky, who was the first ruler of the city, was also known as Fire Burning Sky Lightning God. After Cauac, there was Sky Xul; next came Sky Imx Dog, Scroll Sky, and Jade Sky.

In this chapter, my driver, Mateo, reveals to me his own perceptions of the Sky Gods.

While following in Stephens's and Catherwood's footsteps, I kept alert to any signs that ancient astronauts had indeed impacted the world of the Maya. As we approached Quiriguá, I was well aware of the history of the site and the Sky Dynasty that had ruled this ancient city. But I was not prepared to learn that many of the locals believe that the city was built by men from the sky who came and stayed.

"It was aliens that built Quiriguá," a thin, short Guatemalan with a pencil-thin mustache suddenly declared. We were parked at a "banana crossing" in the middle of a Del Monte banana plantation listening to Hugo, who identified himself as the jefe, the boss, at the banana plant. Along with Mateo and me, Hugo was stopped at the banana crossing on the dirt road that led to Quiriguá. I was trying very hard to listen to what he was telling Mateo, while at the same time watching bundle after bundle of bananas whiz by, hanging from hooks on an elevated monorail that blocked the road when the bananas were being transported from the fields to the loading docks. Each large stalk, with dozens of bunches attached, was covered with a plastic bag. They reminded me of the alien seed pods depicted in the 1950s science-fiction film Invasion of the Body Snatchers.

So when Hugo suddenly declared that aliens had built Quiriguá, I turned my full attention to him. "No human could move those stelae from the quarry to

their present site without some kind of equipment. Some weighed sixty tons. You will see what I tell is true. No mortal man could move such huge objects. Even with present-day technology, it would be difficult. The old ones say the gods flew through the air and dropped those things right where they stand today. The gods must have been aliens if they flew through the sky."

"Do you think the Sky Gods and the aliens were the same?" I asked.

"Sí. They were the same. They came here, and they liked it so much, they stayed."

"The Doctora is tracing the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood, who visited this site in the mid-1800s," Mateo explained.

"That's very interesting," Hugo said. "The Payes descendants still tell stories about Stephens. They liked Catherwood, but not Stephens. Many tour guides will tell you that Stephens and Catherwood visited Quiriguá; it is not true. Only Mr. Catherwood made the trip here. The descendants of the Payes brothers, who owned the land at the time, still talk about how Stephens attempted to buy Quiriguá once he saw Catherwood's drawings, but Stephens was never here."

Hugo was correct about Stephens. While in Guatemala City, Stephens and Catherwood received information about a ruined city hidden in the thick jungle, just three hours from Encuentros, where they had stayed after leaving Copán. While Stephens searched for a functioning government, Catherwood explored the ruins of Quiriguá and recorded its magnificently carved stelae. Stephens, excited by the evidence of these drawings, entered into negotiations with the Payes brothers, owners of the land on which the ancient city stood, to purchase fourteen of its principal monuments. Under the mistaken belief that Stephens had the financial backing of the U.S. government, they stubbornly wanted more money than Stephens could afford. So in the middle of negotiations Stephens and Catherwood left Guatemala City bound for Palenque, Mexico.

As we waited at the crossing, two boys approached the van. I rolled down the window and greeted them. They smiled and held up small fragments of ancient Maya carvings, which they claimed came from the ancient site. When I told them they should not take articles from the site, they laughed and said tourists bought them and moved on when they realized I was not a potential buyer. I rolled up the window and contemplated the paradox of the situation. Stephens had tried to buy the site. Today, if the local Maya children had their

way, they would sell it piece by piece.

"Hugo, have you ever seen aliens or spaceships at this site?" I asked.

"I have seen spaceships many times. It does not matter; they come during the day and night. They never come when there are tourists. Personally, I have never seen an alien or a Sky God, or whatever you choose to call them, but the men [workers] tell me they frequently land their ships near the Acropolis and get out and walk around. They say they hear their chanting at night."

"Do they ever describe what they look like?" I asked.

"Sometimes they come as balls of light and turn into men that look just like them. Other times they look like people but are not people."

"Can you explain?"

"They never really talk about it. They are too afraid, but although they have the form of a man, they are not men. That is all I know."

"What do they mean when they say they hear chanting?"

"That's what they hear."

"Are the chants familiar to the workers?" I asked.

"Sí. They are the old chants of the elders in the villages. Some call them their elders. Some call them relatives. Others call them witches. I have no opinion. I just listen to the men. They are superstitious."

Suddenly the monorail came to a grinding halt, and Hugo saluted and rode away on his bicycle. Mateo put the vehicle into first gear and we slowly moved along the dirt path, but Hugo's words lingered in my head. More than a century and a half had passed since Stephens wrote about Quiriguá in his landmark book. In 1910, the United Fruit Company bought a large chunk of the Motagua valley, including the ruins of Quiriguá, to set up banana plantations. Fortunately, they recognized the significance of the ruins and established an archaeological park around it, taking great pains to guard the site from looters. It is now protected as a World Heritage site by UNESCO. In Stephens's day, visitors trekked through mosquito-infested wilderness to explore the ancient city. Even today, Quiriguá was not the easiest site to visit. No tour buses traveled this way.

Leaving Hugo behind, we drove down the dirt road through seemingly endless miles of banana groves. Finally we pulled into a parking lot. Beyond the ticket kiosk, we found a path that meandered through a grove of massive jungle trees. It led to a large, green, grassy plaza. At the entrance nine giant

stelae, including the largest one found in the Maya World, were sheltered under palapa-roofed pavilions. Ranging from ten to thirty-five feet tall, the stelae carved in red sandstone detailed portraits of rulers wearing massive headdresses, surrounded with the opulent accoutrements of symbolic figures and glyphs.

Many of the figures on these stelae were full-length and were holding double-sided scepters. On one end was a carving of Chaac, the Maya god of water, while at the other end was the head of a great cosmic serpent. I was in awe of each one. I examined each stela carving by carving and photographed them from every angle.

On all sides, I was surrounded by unrestored, jungle-covered mounds of giant jumbled blocks that once made up this ancient city. Huge dome-like stone altars, many with grotesque figures but beautifully and expertly carved, stood as testament to the greatness of this isolated city. Zoomorphs depicting both real and mythical creatures of importance to the Maya, were strewn about the site.

Perhaps, as Hugo said, the most striking feature of Quiriguá was that none of the stone sculptures on the main plaza were carved at the quarry. Each stela was carried to the site and erected in place before the carving began. The largest one stood thirty-five feet tall, five feet wide, and four feet thick, and weighed sixty tons.

"Do you think aliens had a hand in moving these stelae to their current positions as Hugo suggested?" I asked Mateo.

"It took an extraordinary people with extraordinary powers and equipment to move sixty-ton stelae to this site," Mateo replied.

"So, are you saying you agree with Hugo?"

"Don't you find it interesting that most of the rulers were part of the Sky Dynasty?" he asked.

"I find it interesting that you are answering my questions with a question," I responded.

"I believe the ancients were more than Sky Gods with extraordinary powers. I believe they were star travelers from another planet. Just think about their names. Cauac Sky was also known as K'ak' Tiliw Chan Yoat or Fire Burning Sky Lightning God. After Cauac, there was Sky Xul, next came Sky Imx Dog, Scroll Sky, and Jade Sky."

"I have thought about that," I responded, "but I am not sure that makes them aliens."

"Sky was an important name to the Maya. A child named 'Sky' was destined to be a messenger between the Universe and Earth. It is the same today. The name is more than just a word."

"It is the same in many indigenous cultures. A name is not just a name but has a special significance. It can determine destinies," I replied.

"Many elders told that in the beginning, the Maya came from the stars. They believed that the Universe originated with Pleiades, but they never said we were from Pleiades like some writers claim."

"There are some indigenous people who believe they came from Pleiades," I replied. "Of course, they didn't call it Pleiades. That was a title tacked on by the Greeks, I believe, but they always pointed to the sky in that direction. I never gave it much thought until recently when I read that modern-day scientists using the Hubble Telescope discovered that there is a place where stars are born in a great spiral that originates at the site of Pleiades. At the outside of the spiral there is nothing but complete empty space."

"I believe the elders spoke the truth," Mateo said. "We are from the stars. No one knows how the ancient Maya achieved such astronomical precision or insights; they didn't have any astronomical observatories. They didn't have any Hubble telescopes, orbiting in space, and as of today no one has found any remnants of sextants or quadrants. Did they just lie on their backs and watch the stars and planets revolve?" Mateo asked as he stretched out on a step and looked at the sky. "I don't think so," he said, answering his own question. "I believe that the Sky People came to this planet and brought their knowledge with them and the Maya of today are the descendants of those space travelers."

"Why did they not pass along their knowledge to their children?" I asked.

"In many societies, only the leaders held the knowledge. Something must have happened to the leaders. Perhaps they died from a disease, incest, or whatever. Perhaps they went home and left only a few people behind with plans to return, but something happened, and they were unable to make the return voyage. The knowledge that was reserved for this select group was lost when they were gone."

"Interesting premise," I replied.

"Venus and the Moon were major signposts for Quiriguá," Mateo continued. I watched him get up and walk to one of the stela. He pointed out

that it referred to movements of Venus, along with a time indicating an eclipse. "The rotation of the Moon, stars, and planets were [sic] carefully noted as you can see from these carvings. Cauac Sky claimed a close association with Venus. The elders said that on the day of Cauac's death, Venus was barely seen on the western horizon at sunset. On Stela D, where Venus is mentioned as the companion of Cauac Sky, there was an image identified as a Venus Sun deity. On the altar L, the ruler wore a star sign in his headdress."

"Does it offend you that writers such as Erich von Däniken promote the idea that an alien race came to Earth and built these great cities?" I asked.

"It is definitely exploitation, but the white man has been exploiting our knowledge for centuries. They do the same to the Amerindians in the USA. He never asked us what we thought about his theories. You see, Doctora, I believe the Sky People and the Maya are the same. We are descendants of the space travelers who came to Earth and built these great cities. I believe my ancestors came here from another planet. I think they brought with them great scientific and engineering knowledge. Once here, they decided to stay."

"Isn't that in essence what von Däniken claims?

"Not at all. His work is the best example of ethnocentrism practiced today. He believes some highly intellectual race came to Earth and forced the ignorant, savage Maya to build the cities. He does not recognize that the highly intellectual race is our ancestors. We are the same. In his arrogance he decided that Space Gods built the cities and then left. The Maya were no more than their slaves. Of course, if he did admit that the Maya were the same as the Space Gods, and we are their descendants, then he might have to admit that the white man was not superior. But the Maya know the truth. Our connections will always be directed toward the sky because the DNA of the Sky Gods are the blood of the Maya," he said. "Our language is the language of the Sky People. Someday that will be proven. Until then, we still own the mysteries of the Universe and, whether it is von Däniken or anyone else, those mysteries are not for sale. We keep them to ourselves and pass them on to one generation after another, but we do not share. You see, the real knowledge is too dangerous to share. Maybe someday, but probably not in our lifetime, it will be known. The general public is not ready for it."

"When you think of the fame von Däniken has achieved with his ancient astronaut theory, does it make you angry? Does it make you want to speak out against him?"

"No. As you know, we believe that what goes around comes around. He has made millions from his books on the backs of the indigenous people of Mesoamerica and South America. But the people are still poor. We believe that someday, the Great Gods of the Universe will set that straight."

"You mentioned that the Maya still own the mysteries of the universe, but they are too dangerous to reveal. What do you mean by that?"

"People today live in their own world. Even though they profess to believe that alien life exists, if and when they discover that it does, they will not react calmly. First there will be curiosity, then fear, and then aggression. We always try to destroy what we do not understand."

"I have been told that before," I said. "But do you believe that different groups of aliens settled different parts of Earth?" I asked.

"Yes, but the elders never speak of that. I do believe that most of the indigenous people of the Earth, whether they are in the Americas or Australia or some remote Pacific Island, came from the stars. Our belief system and worldview is so different than the rest of the world and yet in many ways we are all connected. We share many of the same beliefs. I cannot speak for the non-indigenous. We have no connection with them."

I listened carefully to Mateo. He was not only knowledgeable about the history of this site, but he knew the stories of the elders, which brought far more understanding than I would have observed on my own. In his lifetime, Mateo had been a teacher, a cultural specialist, and a headmaster of a school. Lately he had taken up the role of professional guide/driver for a "select group of travelers" who, according to him must be "interesting, amiable, curious, and open-minded."

Sitting there at Quiriguá and listening to Mateo, I found it easy to summon visions of shaman and Maya leaders using their multifaceted calendar like a time machine, wandering at will through the distant past and future. It was understandable why writers attached space travel to the abilities of the ancient Maya, and for a moment you can imagine with them.

Quiriguá is a unique site. It is not to be missed whether you are following in the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood, or just a UFO adventurer looking for answers. You will not be disappointed. If you happen to meet Mateo, he will definitely make you a believer that the Sky Gods were travelers from another world who came to Earth, liked what they saw, remained here, and

became known as the Maya.

Chapter 15
We Had Our Own Gods

Blue-skinned aliens have been reported throughout history. In the deep cavern systems beneath the Ozarks, seven-foot blue-skinned men have been encountered. Some sources tell of encounters with this blue-skinned race in the Southern states. The Cherokee Indians told stories of blue-skinned men with large eyes who lived underground and only came to the surface at night. The Hopi Indians also spoke of a race of blue-skinned Star Warriors. While following in the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood, I heard a number of accounts about blue-skinned people from the sky. In this chapter, you will read of an account of a man who saw the blue-skinned men.

"I have heard many stories of alien abductions over the years, but the most interesting was a story told to me by a man in a village a few miles from here," Mateo said as we left Quiriguá. "It happened to him when he was a boy, but he tells it with such detail, there is no question in my mind that he experienced this event. We will drive by his place. We'll stop and see if he is willing to share his story. He is a traditional elder and not accustomed to visits from a gringa, so let me talk with him first."

"I'm certainly lucky you are my driver and guide," I replied.

"When you wrote me that you wanted to follow in the steps of Stephens and Catherwood, I was really excited. I have studied their journey and read their works many times. But when you said you were a collector of stories about UFOs, you were a person after my own heart. I am always talking to people about UFOs. And as you know, I have had my own experience, so I share your interest. Hopefully, I will be able to help you a lot in this area." We slowed as we entered the small village. "His house is on the right. He is called Wak Chan. He says he was named in honor of a legendary Maya warrior who successfully protected his people in many wars with a neighboring city, but the government has yet to find such cities. He speaks only Mayan, so I will translate."

"Does he live alone?"

“He lives alone now that his wife has passed, but most everyone in the community is related to him. He is a very wise man and is highly respected in this region. They say he has the power to heal with his hands. You will feel his power just by being in his presence.” Mateo pulled the car alongside a traditional one-room hut, about the size of a typical bathroom in the USA. His house set back from the road only a few feet. A large, vacant field separated him from another small hut to the west. It was the last residence on the road. I sat in the car and watched a group of children playing in the street. Several dogs got up and walked toward the van. One ventured forth and stood on his hind legs and looked in the window. Mateo returned, pushed him away, and opened the door for me. When I reached down to pet the dog, Mateo warned me away. “He probably has fleas and God knows what else,” he cautioned. “Wak Chan will see you, but he is asking for tobacco.”

“I have some packets of green tobacco in my travel bag in the back of the van.” Mateo walked to the back and opened the double doors. I was aware that the Maya used the green tobacco as snuff like American baseball players. Because green tobacco is more powerful, it maximizes the absorption of nicotine into the blood stream. The modern Maya use tobacco for a number of ailments. It is also believed to provide personal magical protection. I pulled out a packet of green tobacco, handed it to Mateo, and followed him into the gated front yard of Wak Chan.

Mateo guided me to the back of the house, where the elder sat on a beautiful, hand-carved mahogany bench. He was a small man. A straw cowboy hat with a silver concho hat band covered his head but wisps of white hair fell across his ears and made his golden-brown skin appear darker. He kept his eyes averted as I was introduced to him. On closer scrutiny, I realized his eyes were sensitive to the light; one was clouded, perhaps the result of cataracts. “My son, Mateo, tells me you want to hear my story about the star visitors,” he began. Mateo translated. “It has been several years since I have told this story, but I remember it as if it were yesterday.”

“Is he your father?” I asked Mateo.

“No. My father was his boyhood friend. It is traditional. Children in the villages are everyone’s child. So I have many fathers and grandfathers,” Mateo explained.

“This has been my home since the day I was born,” Wak Chan began. “At one time that field had rich soil. It was planted with corn and beans several

times each year and provided us with much bounty," he said as he pointed to vacant lot beside his house. "But it is dead now. Nothing has grown there for years—seventy-two years to be exact. My father never knew what happened to that field and I never told him." He paused and waited for Mateo to translate before he continued. "One night, shortly before the sun appeared in the sky, my little brother and I woke up to a thunderous sound. We walked outside to take a look and we saw a dish-shaped object descend to the ground in that field. I saw it throw up dust and crush our beautiful corn field. We had worked so hard to grow the corn. We were too afraid to wake our father. He was a short-tempered man and he drank too much. We feared he might beat us for waking him." He paused again, opened the package of tobacco, took out a pinch, and placed it inside his cheek.

"Can you describe the craft?" I asked.

"It looked like a dish turned upside down. There were small lights around the outside showing a complete circle. It lit up the whole village. I remember wondering why no one else was awake. In those years, we never saw lights. We had no electricity. We went to bed when it got dark and woke up when the sun came up."

"Did the craft land?"

"Yes. When it landed, four men appeared out of nowhere. They walked very strange." He stood and, although stooped with age, he mimicked their robot-like walk. "Then two more men appeared. One came very close to our hiding place. That's when we realized that they were not humans. Their skin was blue. They were very tall. Twice as tall as me. They walked to the house across the field and vanished through the walls. They did not use the door. They walked through the walls." He paused for a moment and stared off toward the house as though reliving the event. "I knew the family that lived there, even though we were forbidden to go there. When the blue men disappeared, my brother and I were frightened, but we had no time to respond. All of a sudden, they emerged from the house with the parents and the two little girls. We sat there absolutely frozen in fear. I wanted to run over there and stop them, but I told my brother we were no match for men who had power to walk through walls." Mateo translated.

"What did you do at that point?"

"We did nothing. We watched these Sky Men lead the family into their machine and they were gone. The lights from the object flashed on and lighted

up the landscape like noonday. It rose above the trees very slowly and shot off into the night like an arrow. My brother and I sat there afraid and speechless. We never talked about what we saw to anyone except Mateo's father. He was like our brother." He turned to Mateo. "I miss your father," Wak Chan said.

"I miss him, too," Mateo said. Wak Chan removed a handkerchief from his back pocket and wiped his watery eyes and then continued.

"Often when darkness fell on the village, my brother, José, and Mateo's father, and I would lie outside and look at the stars and imagine what might have happened to the giant blue men. We knew they were up there and probably kidnapping other families. There were times we wished they would take us. We were curious boys and wanted to find out about them and where they took the family."

"Do you remember the next time you saw the family after the night of the abductions?" I asked.

"We saw them that afternoon. They appeared normal. We were afraid to ask them about the blue men so we asked Mateo's father, who was bolder than the two of us, to ask them. He walked over to their house. The two girls were in their fenced-in yard. He asked them if they had seen any giant blue men and they ran in the house screaming." He paused and laughed. "The missionary father came out of the house and told Hernando, Mateo's father, to stay away from his daughters. We all had a good laugh about that. We knew their father did not want them playing with us. We were the dirty village kids. He kept them isolated from us. The girls were not even allowed to play with the village girls. They were lonely little girls."

"Why did they keep them away from the village children? I don't understand."

"They were white Mexicans. We were Maya. We were dirty little kids."

"Did you think of yourself as dirty?" I asked.

"Never. We knew who we were. Hernando said we were of royal blood and that we were descendants of god kings and that when our people were building great cities, the Spanish were living in caves. So despite what everyone said about us, we knew the truth. Mateo's father was a smart man."

"Where is your brother and Mateo's father?" I asked as I looked at the duo.

"My brother, Jaguar Sky, died ten years ago. Hernando passed two years ago. We were close until the end." He paused and spoke directly to Mateo and

then Mateo addressed me.

"Wak Chan wants to know if you have heard of other families being kidnapped by blue men."

"Please tell him that I have heard stories of abductions, but I have heard only one story where witnesses reported seeing an abduction. However the space men did not walk through walls. This makes his story unique." Mateo smiled and nodded.

"Does the family still live in the village?"

"No. They are gone. They only lived here for a short time. Their father was a missionary. He came to teach us about Jesus but, although we liked the stories about Jesus, in those days, we had our own ways. If there was such a person as Jesus, he was not looking out for us. The missionary was called Ralph Lopez. He was the little girls' father. I can't remember the name of his church, but one day the men of the village told Ralph he should move to another village and he packed his things and left." I saw a smile cross his face as he remembered the evangelist who lived among them. "Mateo's father and I talked about the day. We talked about the fear on the missionary's face. He was afraid of the village men."

"Why did the village men ask the family to leave?"

"We are a traditional people," he said. "We had our own gods. We didn't need any more."

We spent most of the morning with Wak Chan. When noontime approached, his granddaughter appeared with food; we ate tortillas filled with beans and chicken. Before we left, I gifted Wak Chan with several packages of green tobacco and a case of his favorite drink, Coca-Cola. He made me promise that the next time I came to Guatemala that I would come to visit him. I promised.

I often think of Wak Chan. While he never traveled far beyond his village and had no desire to do so, he had witnessed blue giants from another planet who abducted a family and lived to share his experience. He did not regard the visitors as gods, nor did he embrace the white man's god, because, as he so aptly expressed: He had his own gods and did not need any more.

Chapter 16
Aliens With Red Eyes

Although uncommon, there are records of alien visitors with red eyes. Some researchers have reported giant aliens with lizard-skin and yellow or red cat eyes. In this chapter, you will read about four young women, who encountered four star travelers who may have planned to abduct them, but their screaming caused the aliens to retreat to their spacecraft. The girls insisted the aliens had red eyes.

I decided to take the next day off after the Quiriguá visit and spend the day relaxing, writing in my journal, and rewriting my notes. In the late afternoon, Mateo called. His sister, who lived in a small village outside of Guatemala City, had invited us to dinner. "She is an English teacher and wants to meet you. She loves talking to English speakers. I told her I would convince you to go."

"I would love to go."

"Good. It will give you a chance to eat some home-cooked Guatemalan food and to meet my nieces. They had an encounter recently, and I think you would enjoy listening to them. My sister was reluctant at first to let you speak with them about the event, but I convinced her that you are okay and that it would be good for the girls to meet you."

I met Mateo's nieces at dinner. Itzel, Eme, and Ixchel were three sisters. They lived in a small village composed of a few traditional houses, a bodega, a family restaurant, a gas station with a convenience store and outside restaurant, and a small hardware store that sold everything from denim jeans and home-canned goods to hammers and shovels. Their home, a modern ranch-style adobe, sat next to the school. Mateo's sister was the English language and Spanish teacher at the high school. Akna, a cousin, who was with the three sisters at the time of their encounter, was living with Mateo's sister and going to school. The young women ranged in age from seventeen to nineteen. Itzel and Eme were identical twins and they dressed the part, both wearing jeans and tight pink sweaters. Akna was the youngest of the group at seventeen. She

had her hair braided in two pigtails. Her perfect skin would have been the envy of any Hollywood movie star. Ixchel was the oldest at nineteen. Her hair was shoulder-length and curled. She had a sophisticated manner about her, announcing that she had moved from adolescence into womanhood, unlike her sisters. All had dreams of becoming teachers. Ixchel was already enrolled in the university, the twins were expected to enroll during the next term, and Akna planned to follow suit in another year.

"Uncle Mateo wants us to go to school. Our mama and papa, too. She does not want us working as maids in hotels or waitresses. She says we need to get an education," Itzel said as I settled on the floor among pillows the girls had arranged in a circle. "Our mother is a teacher. It is a good profession for a woman in Guatemala. It is an honor to meet a university professor. We have so many questions for you about how classes are taught in the USA. We are so happy that you came to see us."

"The truth is, Doctora, we want to know about fashion, boys, and makeup, but we will talk about UFOs first," Eme said. The four girls laughed nervously, but I recognized the truth in her declaration.

"I will talk about anything you want to talk about," I replied. We sat on the floor in their living room as the girls talked about their culture, their pride in their heritage, and their hopes and prayers of realizing their parents' dreams. Akna was the most gregarious of the group and, despite her age, she could have passed for twenty-five. Her denim shorts and KISS t-shirt made her appear as a typical Montana teenager. She confided that her mama did not think she should talk to people about the encounter for fear they would think she was crazy.

"Our mama doesn't tell us not to talk about it. She said we should not broadcast it. We told her that we wanted to tell you about the experience because Uncle Mateo said it was okay. He said you did not know us and would not identify us," Eme said.

"I promise that no one will ever know who you are. That will be our secret."

"I don't really care if people think I'm weird," Eme said. "I know what happened to us. We didn't imagine it. It happened and people should know that aliens are real."

"I agree," Itzel said. "If people know these things are happening, they will not be so surprised when aliens land and make themselves known."

As the girls debated the issue of publicly talking about their experience and the limited number of people they had told about the event, it was clear that their parents and family members were concerned that the young women not be regarded as mentally unstable or, even worst, brujas (witches). After a somewhat lengthy discussion of the pros and cons of telling their story, the group became quiet and looked at Akna.

"It happened three weeks ago," Akna began. "We had gone to the plaza with our family. We like to dance," she explained.

"It was a Saturday night," Eme interjected.

"We stayed until about midnight," Akna continued.

"It happened about a few blocks from here," Eme said.

"I caught some movement out of the corner of my eye," said Ixchel, "and I told Akna."

"That's when I saw them. There were four of them," Akna said.

"I thought it was the local boys playing a trick on us," Eme said. "I yelled at them and asked them to identify themselves, but they did not respond."

"When no one answered, we began to move on. All of a sudden, Eme let out a scream and I thought someone was attacking her and I was trying to get to her, but I couldn't move," Akna said. I noticed how her voice had become more animated as she remembered the event.

"I was trying to get to her, too," Ixchel said, "But I couldn't move."

"I yelled, 'Come out and show yourself,'" Akna said.

"That's when we saw them clearly. It was obvious they were not human," said Ixchel.

"Well, they were like humans. There were four of them. They were small, skinny men, with long, bony arms," added Eme.

"They were not like the local boys who have muscles," Itzel laughed.

"They had red eyes." Akna looked at the others and they all nodded in agreement. "When I saw those red eyes, I thought they were devils and I screamed as loud as I could."

"Then we all screamed at the same time. We were trying to attract attention. That's when they released us. I ran to Eme and pulled her to her feet," Akna said.

"Then we ran," Itzel said. "I thought if we hesitated, we might not get

away."

"That's when we saw the spacecraft," Akna said. "I could make out a circular object. It had white lights around the bottom outlining a circle. It moved over us and then descended again, above the road, and stayed in front of us."

"Then suddenly it shot upward and was gone within seconds," Eme added.

"When it was gone, we hugged each other and screamed and began running toward home," Itzel said.

"I kept thinking that if something happened to us, what would our mama do? She couldn't deal with losing three daughters," Eme added.

"And a cousin," Akna interjected. They all giggled in agreement.

"What else can you tell me about your encounter, other than the fact that you felt like they were trying to abduct one or all of you?"

"I think the scariest part was being paralyzed," Ixchel added.

"I was really afraid," Eme said. "I was afraid they were going to take me away from my family. I saw a TV program on alien abductions and I was afraid."

"Do you think having seen the TV program in any way influenced your memory of what happened to you?" I asked.

"If you mean, did we just get scared and imagine it, no. That is not what happened. They were real. They were not human. They had red eyes. I've never seen a human with red eyes," replied Eme.

"Obviously, you cannot grow up in this society without seeing movies about UFOs and aliens," Ixchel said. "But this was not a movie and it was not imagination. I am still haunted by those red eyes. I can close my eyes and see them as though they were standing right in front of me."

"Do you remember anything else about them?" I asked.

"They were all dressed alike. When they came into the light, their suits sparkled. They were shiny. A light, shiny blue. In the dark, the suits did not sparkle. Only when they came into the light. They tried to stay in the shadows. They did not want anyone to see them. That is what I think. Anyone who saw them would know they were not from here," Akna responded.

"Their eyes glowed. Their heads were bigger than humans'," Eme said.

"They were bigger on top and smaller on bottom," Ixchel said.

"They wore belts of some kind, too," Eme said, "but I didn't see a weapon. I don't remember that they carried anything."

"Their weapon was their minds," Itzel said.

"That's true," Akna said. "They were playing with our minds. I don't really know how to explain it. But for just a moment, they made me think they were Enrique, Juan, Arturo, and Santiago."

"Who are they?" I asked.

"They are local boys. They like us." All of the girls giggled and blushed.

"Can you tell me how they played with your minds?" I asked.

"I thought I heard our friends' voices calling to me. They said, 'Let's go for a walk. Let's dance'—things like that. For a moment, I thought they were our friends, but I know it was the aliens. They have power over your mind," Akna said.

"That's strange, because for a moment, I thought the four aliens looked like our friends. I remember thinking it was strange they were hiding from us," said Eme.

"Do you think they were controlling our brains?" Ixchel asked.

"You tell me," I responded.

"I think they were trying to control us. Maybe our screaming broke that control, because once we screamed they let us go," Eme said.

"Did you tell anyone about your experience?" I asked.

"Shortly after the UFO flew away, we met our brother coming down the road toward us. We told him what happened. He had seen the UFO so he walked us home, [and] told us to stay inside and lock the door," Eme replied.

"We told Mama and Papa what happened to us. We talked to our aunties and our uncles. They told us not to worry about it," Ixchel added. "Our papa had seen UFOs several times over the past twenty years. I think he was worried, but he tried not to let us see his worries. After we went to bed, I heard him slip out of the house. I looked out the window and he had called some of the neighbor men and they stayed up all night watching the houses. I think he was afraid they would return."

"I didn't tell anyone except my mama," Akna said. "But then the whole village knew about it anyway. Nothing is ever a secret for long in the village."

I spent the evening talking to the girls. Despite a variety of questions

intended to challenge their memory of the night, their stories never varied. They only confirmed the seriousness of the event that occurred that night.

I have kept in touch with the four young women over the past few years. Three of them have completed the university and have realized their dreams of being teachers. I have met with the three sisters twice since our first visit. We have talked about their lives, their careers, and their dreams for the future over long lunches and during hot, humid evenings in the plaza. The three sisters continue to live with their parents, including the twins who married brothers the day after their graduation. As of the last account, Ixchel was dating an American archaeologist working in Guatemala, and talked of marriage and moving to the States with him. She was nervous about the move. She wondered if she would be able to teach in the USA and if she would fit in within a university environment. I regularly receive e-mails from them telling me stories of their adventures and asking advice about teaching reluctant learners. None of them have reported another encounter.

Chapter 17
They Are Poison

Like many other indigenous peoples of the Americas, the traditional Maya recognized in their staple crop, maize, a vital force of life. This is clearly shown by their mythological traditions. According to their creation stories, man himself was created from corn. Many Maya paintings testified to the existence of a rich mythology centered around maize.

In this chapter, you will meet a Maya farmer who encountered a strange little man who also had an interest in maize.

After spending several hours listening to the girls tell me about their encounter with the aliens, talking about their dreams and answering their questions about the USA, Mateo's sister, Maria, suggested we spend the night. "A local farmer delivers fresh vegetables every morning to our house. He had an encounter that is quite amazing. If you stay over, I will introduce you and suggest that he tell you his story." I gladly accepted her invitation and was shown to a room with a hand-carved mahogany bed and a private bathroom. "Papa built this part of the house for his mother, but Grandmama died before it was finished. You are our first guest in this room," Eme told me as the four girls joined me on the huge, homemade bed. For the next hour, I was questioned about fashion, dating, and American boys. When Maria knocked on the door and told the girls that it was time for bed, they reluctantly left the room.

The next morning, I was awakened by Akna, who was dressed in a white blouse and navy blue skirt. "My school uniform," she explained. "We hate it, but it makes everybody the same. No rich or poor. No difference. Breakfast will be served in ten minutes," she said as she offered me a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. "I am your wakeup call, as they say in the USA." I crawled out of bed and dressed within minutes. I was finishing my breakfast of fresh fruit and boiled eggs when the farmer, named Hector, knocked on the kitchen door. Following introductions, he sat at the kitchen table and politely accepted the coffee set before him. Maria and the girls lined up to say goodbye

to Mateo and me as they headed out of the house for school. Mateo brought a plate of tortillas and eggs to the table and offered them to Hector. He smiled and filled a tortilla with eggs and a salsa mix with beans and ate heartily. He was a small man. He wore a straw hat and cut-off trousers, revealing sandals. A home-spun shirt with a hole for his head fell near his knees.

"Maria tells me that you had an encounter with an alien," I began as he finished his tortilla. Mateo translated in Mayan. He looked at me and nodded. "It happened about two years ago. I was working with my brother in the fields. At about 2 p.m. we decided to end our work and go home. I remember it was hot, hotter than normal. As we gathered our things to begin the walk home, my brother noticed a strange object at tree-top level which was moving straight down, breaking limbs and trees." He paused, allowing time for Mateo to translate. "The object never set down on the ground, but hung in the air above the ground. We had never seen anything like that before," Hector said.

"Can you describe the object?" I asked.

"It was round like two plates turned upside down together. It was brown—dull, dark brown, like rusted metal."

"Did you see any beings?" Again, Mateo translated.

He nodded. "A strange little man came out of the object. He floated to the ground. He walked very stiff with short steps. I thought he must be a demon." He paused again and ate another tortilla.

"Can you describe his physical description?" I asked.

"He wore a one-piece suit. It was brown, and his head was covered with the same material. His hands were covered and his shoes were a part of his suit and the same color, too. I knew he was not from around here. No one dresses like that around here."

"Did the strange man see you?" I asked.

"Not at first. He walked into our corn field. He checked the ears and took several of them." I asked Mateo to clarify what he had said to make sure I understood.

"He says that the alien went into the corn field and took samples of his corn. He put them in a bag that was a part of his suit," Mateo said.

"What did you think when you saw him taking samples of your corn?" I asked. Mateo offered Hector another tortilla as he translated. Hector accepted and did not speak again until he had finished the food.

“I did not understand what he was doing. If he wanted our corn, he should have asked. We would have given it to him.”

“Did he communicate with you in any way?”

“No. He didn’t look at us. I don’t think he saw us. But then, my brother jumped up and tried to scare him away. When he didn’t move, my brother walked toward him, and that’s when the stranger floated toward the brown object above the trees. My brother chased him, but the stranger floated upward. The object took off, moving straight upward, and I saw the door at the bottom close.”

“Was your brother okay?” I asked.

“At first we were paralyzed. We couldn’t move. It took an hour more before we had the strength to walk home. The next day we both stayed in bed. We were too weak to sit up. I threw up several times and could not eat. My brother was very bad. He had a rash on his face and neck. It stayed there for days and then the healer fixed it. We made a pact. We will never again touch strange men from the sky. They are poison.”

“Can you remember anything else?” I asked.

“They walked funny. Stiff—like their feet hurt all the time, but then I think I know why,” he said.

“Why?” I asked.

“They had round feet.”

“Round feet?”

“Their feet were too big for their small bodies. They looked round. My brother and I talked about that. If they had round feet they cannot be from around here. They must have come from another place.” Mateo refilled his coffee cup and translated.

“How tall was the stranger?” I asked. He stood and measured his size on his body. From his description, I estimated that the being would have been around 3 1/2 feet tall. “Could you make out anything about his face?” I asked. Again, Mateo translated.

“He wore some kind of covering over his face. I could not see his face to describe it.”

“What else can you tell me about your experience?” I asked.

“That stranger did something to us. My brother has trouble with rashes even two years later. Someday [sic] I am very tired and cannot move. I think the

stranger from the sky was poison for sure."

As we sat at the table and watched Hector devour two more tortillas, he asked me if I knew of a medicine that might help his brother. When I inquired about seeing a doctor, he told Mateo that he did not trust doctors unless they were the local shaman. When I offered to pay for a doctor, he respectfully declined.

Hector had a simple explanation for the pain that he and his brother suffered: The alien was poison. In UFO circles, his account would likely be rejected, but I think that in his own way, Hector was correct. Whether they suffered from radiation poison or from exposure to unknown chemicals, the brothers' lives were changed. Despite their physical condition, Hector remained hopeful that his story might be of some good to others who might experience similar encounters. "People should know, if they encounter these strange little men, they should stay away. They are poison."

I have talked with Mateo's sister, Maria, several times since I met Hector. He is still struggling with his health, but that does not prevent him from making his daily deliveries to her house. "He still asks about you," Maria said. "He calls you a one-hearted woman." Among the Maya, that means you are one he can trust. I could ask for no greater compliment.

Chapter 18
The Red-Eyed Reptilian

Various types of alien creatures reportedly exist. Though many are human-like, others take on animal-like qualities. One of the most common are the reptilian beings who range from five to nine feet in height. They reportedly have scaly skin that is greenish-brown in color, wide lipless mouths, and red eyes. Observers often report they have claws for hands and feet.

In this chapter you will meet Chak Took, a Maya elder, who encountered a reptilian being when he was twelve years old.

We drove down the dusty, unpaved road to the house of an elder who did odd jobs for Mateo's sister. Cornfields towered above us on each side of the road. At the end of the field, six small, traditional houses appeared in a cluster. We stopped at the first one while Mateo inquired about Chak Took, the elder, who reportedly had an encounter when he was a boy.

We found him eating an orange from his backyard tree. Dressed in tattered brown pants and a frayed, plaid shirt that had been buttoned unevenly, he reminded me of many of the elders I had met fleetingly during my travels. He took off his straw hat, bowed slightly to me, and welcomed us. When he smiled, he had only one front tooth. He proceeded to show me his orange tree and peeled a second orange and offered it to me. Mateo, who spoke to him in the local Mayan dialect, told him the purpose of our visit. The elder looked at me and spoke quietly to Mateo. When I saw the elder nod, I knew that he was willing to talk about his experience. After peeling another orange and offering it to Mateo, he led us to a bench under a large tree and called for his wife to bring food. After the tortillas and eggs with beans were served, he began his story.

"The first time I saw a UFO was in 1957. I was twelve years old. It was a quiet evening. I was sleeping in the hammock in the backyard. It was a hot night. Darkness had fallen upon our village." He filled a tortilla with the mixture and waited for Mateo to translate. When Mateo paused, he continued. "Suddenly I saw a bright ball of light the size of the moon drop from the night

sky and come to rest in the jungle. I called to my father, who was already sleeping and told him what I had seen. He grabbed his machete. We ran into the cool night in the direction I saw the light come down." He paused and pointed. "It came down in that direction. I can still see it as it descended into the trees." Mateo, who had finished a tortilla, translated.

"Did anyone else see it?" I asked.

"No. But we did not go alone in search of the light. As my father and I made our way out of the village, two other men had seen the bright light and joined our hunt. I remember that the evening seemed normal enough, but as we walked deeper into the jungle, there was a strange smell. I had never smelled it before and it made me sick." He stopped and pointed to his stomach. "Sick, very sick." I watched as he peeled another orange, offering first to me and then to Mateo, who took it. "One of the men with us suggested it was a falling star from the sky. I had seen falling stars before, so I knew better. I knew it was not a star, but I had been taught to honor our elders, so I did not speak up. You see, when the stars fall, they have long fiery tails. This was not a falling star. It was round and as big as the moon."

"How long did it take you to get to the site where the ball of light had fallen?"

"Maybe an hour. When we arrived at the sight we expected to see a hole in the earth or some remains of the fallen object, but there was nothing. Disappointed, we turned to leave, when we saw a glow coming from a place deeper in the jungle." Mateo translated again and filled another tortilla.

"We moved toward the glow and that's when we saw peering above us a pair of red, burning eyes glowing in the trees. I could have sworn I heard a hissing sound. It scared me, but the others did not hear it."

"Could it have been an animal?"

"No. We were familiar with the eyes of animals. We knew the difference. One of the village men had a lantern. He held it high, aiming it in the direction of the red eyes. The creature was frightening. His face resembled a lizard. His skin was green, maybe brown. He blended into the jungle very well. If the sun was shining, it would have been difficult to see him. When the light hit him, he jumped from the tree." He paused and sipped a bottle of water while Mateo once again translated.

"Can he describe what 'rough skin' means?" I asked. As Mateo translated, I drank from my water bottle and watched the interchange between the two.

“He says that the creature had scales like a fish.”

“How big was the creature?”

“He says that it was twice his size and that it was very strong. That it jumped from a tree limb that was four or five times as high as him. He felt the earth bounce when he landed,” Mateo translated.

“The tree limb was about that high,” Chak said as he pointed to a limb on the tree in the yard. I estimated that the tree limb would have been more like thirty feet high and wondered how a ten-foot creature could jump from a tree that high without hurting himself.

“What happened after he jumped from the tree?” I asked.

“He disappeared into the dense foliage in the direction of the glow.”

“It was at that point that we all became very dizzy and sick. The smell I had encountered earlier overwhelmed us. We had no interest in following the creature we had discovered, nor did we have any inclination to search out the glow. We returned home and the next morning we didn’t even talk about the incident. In fact, it was like it never happened.”

“Do you mean you had no memory of it?”

“We remembered. We didn’t talk about it. We were afraid if we talked about it, he might reappear. We considered ourselves very lucky. He could have killed us and eaten us. By mid-morning we were all sick. The sickness lasted for weeks. We developed high fevers and rashes. We were too weak to walk. The village shaman made different medicines. Eventually, we recovered.”

“Did you ever talk about it among yourselves?” I asked.

“Never,” he said, shaking his head.

“Was that your last encounter with a UFO?” I asked.

“I have seen lights many times in the jungle during my seventy-five years, but I have never investigated them. They are a common occurrence here, but I have no interest in following them. One encounter with the red-eyed demon was enough.”

After the interview, Chak Took guided me around his backyard. He pointed out various fruit trees on his property and medicinal herbs growing in coffee cans. Each had a purpose. He led us to the back of his property where four half-grown hogs lounged in a cinderblock cage. When he approached, the hogs stood on their hind legs, and he affectionately patted their heads. He introduced

each one by name. Mateo told me later that he had named them after Guatemalan politicians.

It was very hard to leave Chak Took. He followed us to the van and Mateo unloaded two cases of water and a case of Coca-Cola. When he shook my hand, I slipped the equivalent of $50 American dollars into his hand. He smiled and spoke to Mateo, who later told me that the elder told him that the money would pay for his grandson's school for the year.

I often think of Chak Took. I had never met anyone who had encountered a reptilian creature, although I had on occasion met individuals who had encountered humanoid figures with red eyes or scaly skin. But Chak Took stood out above all the others. He had welcomed me, a stranger into his home, and told a story that he rarely told. He told Mateo that he had only told the story to two people: Mateo's sister and me. For that, I was both grateful and honored.

Chapter 19
The Shining People of the Red Hand

Hand paintings are found in rock art and on building sites around the world. But scientists have always asked: What was their meaning? Were they signature of the artist? Was it the shaman acknowledging the spirit world? Even Stephens and Catherwood recorded the mystery of the red hand in their travels. Given that the images existed among the ancient Maya and are used today by contemporary builders as a symbol of their contribution to a structure, the "red hand" of ancient Maya may have been misinterpreted by outsiders.

In this chapter, you will meet a Maya elder who explains the meaning of the red hand print as he learned from his elders.

We spent two nights at Mateo's sister's house. There was a celebration in the village honoring one of the Catholic saints, and Mateo thought I might enjoy participating. His sister insisted that I stay as her guest. She was an English teacher at the local school and enjoyed the opportunity to speak English with an English speaker. After a day of celebration, dancing, and eating too much food, Mateo and I set out for our return trip to Guatemala City the next day. On the way, he suggested that we take a round-about tour of some small Maya sites tucked away in the jungle. I agreed wholeheartedly.

Mateo and I met Yoc, a Maya elder, who looked younger than the eighty years he claimed to be, at a small site in the Guatemalan jungle. The site was not on a tourist map (or on any map, for that matter), but rather was a place in the jungle with tree-covered mounds that hid a city, where we stopped to rest and eat a packed lunch provided by Maria, Mateo's sister. Yoc greeted us shortly after we pulled off the highway. He was the self-appointed protector of the small, no-name Maya site. Twenty years ago, according to him, the government had grandiose plans for restoring the site. They built a caretaker's hut and then, without explanation, they abandoned their plans. Yoc took it upon himself to move into the small caretaker hut when it became obvious the government had lost interest in the site. He assumed the role of caretaker. No one ever questioned his authority. In return for his illegal squatting, he policed

the site and kept looters away. In his younger days, Yoc traveled to the USA and worked in California and Washington, which accounted for his good command of the English language. He loved the States, as he called them, but living in fear took its toll. After he saved enough money to build a house for his mother and his siblings, he moved back to Guatemala and resumed the life of a farmer. Although he wasn't paid for keeping the ancient site safe, he had a house and a garden spot and an occasional tip from a wayward tourist. He took me inside his hut and pointed to a shelf near his hammock. "My library," he said. "American tourists give me their unwanted books. So I practice English by reading." I looked over the shelf, which contained everything from Stephen King to Danielle Steele and a large English-Spanish dictionary.

"Do you read these books?" I asked.

"Every night," he said.

As Mateo and I shared our lunch with him, he kept us entertained with stories of giants, little people, and the hairy ones. As we prepared to leave, we left him a case of water and fruit we had bought at a roadside stand. I added several paperback books to his library, two Tony Hillerman novels about Navajo policemen, Craig Johnson's latest novel about a Wyoming sheriff, and a collection of Agatha Christie's novels about the French Inspector Poirot. In return, he insisted that we allow him to show us around site. While I followed along behind him, choosing my steps carefully, I saw the remains of a small temple; three sides were standing. The three of us sat down on a wooden bench in front of the stone edifice. Unlike many of the structures at the site that were nothing more than mounds of rubble, this was a standing structure with a smooth arch over the doorway. There were painted red hands decorating the facade. "I built this bench. I like to come here in the early mornings and sit. This was the altar of the Shining Ones," he said.

"Who are the Shining Ones?"

"They are the Space People, the Sky Gods, the Star People, the extraterrestrials or aliens—whatever you like to call them," he said. "They are the ones who left their handprints."

"What do you know about the Star People?" I asked.

"There are many different Star People. They come from many different places. Only one group is connected to the Maya. Some of the Star People are from this solar system, but not all. The Shining People tell me there are sixty-seven solar systems in a confederation and that thousands of spacecraft visit

Earth on any given day. At this moment, there are hundreds of space ships circling the Earth. Our governments do not have the technology to see them. They tell me that their people live all over the Earth watching and helping man."

"So are you telling me that you have been in contact with the Star People?" I asked.

"I am in contact with them month by month."

"Does that mean every month?"

"No. It means some months."

"Tell me about the Star People who live among us."

"They have specific tasks. They do not live here permanently. They help scientists to improve the life of people. They help leaders who work for peace. They perform many tasks as I understand. They never reveal themselves to their human friends. They are gone now. They come in sixteen-year cycles. Soon they will come again. They left in 2000; they will return in 2016. They will stay for sixteen years and then leave for sixteen years."

"Do you know why there is a sixteen-year cycle?"

"I understand that it takes them sixteen years to travel to Earth. When they return another group leaves. Thus, they are here sixteen years and then sixteen years later another group arrives."

"What do they look like?" I asked.

"Like you and me. They can look like anyone they like. On this planet they look human. On another they look like the dominant species."

"Why do you call them the Shining People?" I asked.

"In their true state, they are balls of light. It is only when they assume human form that you see them. Otherwise you are blinded by them. Many people never know they have met them. They see balls of light, not realizing that they are actually living forms."

"What can you tell me about the red hands?"

"I am sure you have seen them other places," he said. I nodded.

"There are stories about the Brothers of the Red Hand. They were a group of sky men who traveled throughout universe collecting knowledge. They held the secrets of the origins of all peoples of Earth as well as populated planets through the universe."

"So the Brothers of the Red Hand left their imprints on the places they passed?" I asked.

"Sí. The Brothers were born of the Shining People. They have been on Earth since the beginning of time. Everywhere archaeologists go, they find the red handprint. Scientists say the red hand is the signature of the builders, but it is not true. For those who know, the red hand stands for knowledge."

"What else have you learned from the Shining People?"

"That their lifespan is 800 years. They told me that we are the only warring planet in this solar system. There are other planets that war, but they are not in this solar system. They say they have given our scientists the knowledge to cure all diseases, but they have not used it. They say there are planets where the inhabitants still live in the Dark Ages and do not even know about the wheel. They say there are planets where the inhabitants never age. They talk of one planet that is so far advanced to others that the beings there can assume almost any form they choose simply by using their mind. They say there are planets with cities made of crystals and shine like the moon at night because the planets have no other night source of light." He paused for a moment. "I would like to see that planet."

"Can you describe the Shining People's spacecraft?" I asked.

"It looks like a big hat. It is the best description. It looks like metal, but it is not, although it resembles silver to the human eye. It makes no sound, but it can fly like a lightening strike."

"How old were you when you first met the Shining People?"

"My grandmother told me stories of the Star People when I was a little boy. One night I saw a beam of light come down from the sky. I followed the beam of light. A ball of light appeared and a man walked out of it. He shook my hand and called me by name. I was about twelve at the time. I have been seeing them since that day. Even in the States."

We sat with Yoc most of the afternoon, but his story of the red hands and the Shining People never varied. I have often thought of this kind, gentle elder who spoke with such calmness and clarity as he talked about the Brotherhood of the Red Hand and the Shining People who helped our scientists and leaders. Hopefully, when they return in 2016, we will witness their influence.

Chapter 20
They Told Me I Would Not Remember

Monsignor Corrado Balducci, a retired Roman Catholic priest living in Rome, has made some startling statements about UFOs and alien abductions on Italian television in recent years. While maintaining that he is not speaking on behalf of the Vatican or the Pope, he has said that UFOs and alien abduction are definitely interesting and worthy of investigation. During an interview, which was published in Whitley Strieber's Confirmation, he noted:

> It is reasonable to believe and to affirm that extraterrestrials exist. Their existence can no longer be denied, for there is too much evidence for the existence of extra-terrestrials and flying saucers as documented by UFO research. To assert categorically that they are illusions and hallucination, or that eyewitness testimony accounts are not credible, is wrong.… This would have serious consequences for religion itself, since religion is founded on an historical incident, on the birth of Jesus Christ.…

In this chapter, you will meet a Roman Catholic priest who had a personal encounter with a UFO and a Star Man. The incident made him a firm believer in the existence of extraterrestrial life.

Mateo greeted me Sunday morning with a big smile on his face. "Hurry, Doctora. We must eat and go to Mass. I have a special surprise for you." Because I had become accustomed to Mateo's surprises, I did as I was told and opted for scrambled eggs and toast so that I would not be late for whatever event Mateo had in mind for me. After Mass, Mateo asked me to remain seated until the other parishioners had left the church. We were still seated when Father Felipe closed the doors. I watched the priest walk toward us and settle in the pew in front of us.

"Father, this is the Doctora I spoke about—the professor who is collecting stories about UFOs and Sky People." Father Felipe nodded and offered his hand to me. "Father Felipe and I were boys together," Mateo continued. "We

grew up in the same village and went to the same schools. Obviously our lives took different paths, but it is reassuring to know I have a direct link to heaven," Mateo chuckled. "Father Felipe, my oldest and dearest friend, has a story to tell you about UFOs. I contacted him and told him about you. I think you will want to hear his story." The priest smiled at Mateo and nodded. He was dressed in a long black robe. A large silver cross embossed with jade stones hung around his neck. His white hair was striking against his bronze skin. Although he had Spanish blood, it was obvious that he was a Mestizo.

"The year was 1982. I was thirteen years old. I lived in the same village as Mateo. It was July—July 15, to be exact. I remember because it was my birthday. There was a party for me. The village turned out to share in the celebration. Mateo was there. I fell asleep around midnight. We lived on the edge of the village. There was a small field beside our house. That is the place we played football. It was a part of the schoolyard as I recall." He looked at Mateo for confirmation.

"As I recall, it was the playground of the school," Mateo said. The priest nodded.

"I woke up in the middle of the night. I saw flashing lights outside. It was very strange to me. We didn't have electricity in our village, so I had only seen electric lights a time or two. I could even see them flashing with my eyes closed. At first I was very excited. I had never seen anything of such beauty. I tried to wake up my three brothers who slept in the same room with me. They would not awaken no matter how hard I tried."

"Tell her about me," Mateo said.

"In time, dear friend. I am trying to tell as it happened. I remember being told, in my mind, to go out the bedroom window. I did as I was told and crawled out the window. Once outside I saw these colorful balls of light. Some were still in the sky but some were on the ground and when they hit the earth they transformed into men. I went up to one of the men and asked him about his flying machine. I was expecting to see something like the pictures in comic books that I had seen in school, but his machine was different. He did not answer me; instead he held this object in his hand and shot at me. I felt a slight prick on my shoulder, and he said that it would allow him to track me wherever I went in the world. I remember thinking, 'If this strange man was from space, why would he want to follow me?'"

"What did he look like?" I asked.

"I can't remember what he looked like, but I was not afraid of him. I have always had the feeling that he was very kind."

"What about the place where he shot you? Is there a scar?"

"When I was younger, there was a slight indentation—a small, straight line—but it is gone now with time and too much weight." He paused and stroked his stomach, and laughed. "The village women are very good cooks."

"What else can you tell me about that night?" I asked.

"After talking with the Sky Man, I saw something very strange. I watched as my neighbors, my relatives, and even my best friend, Mateo, stood in the field dazed. One by one they were taken on board the craft and then, maybe a half hour later, they would return to the field. I ran to Mateo and tried to drag him out of the line, but he could not be moved. He was like a stone statue. He didn't even look at me. He was under their spell. I was helpless. I remember sitting on a rock and crying. The stranger approached me again and told me not to cry. He said tomorrow I would not remember what happened on this night."

"But you did," I said.

"Yes. I did and I told the Sky Man I would remember. I would never forget what happened. He said I would only remember it as a dream."

"Did you have a period when you did not remember?" I asked.

"No. That night I picked up a rock and carried it home. I put it on the floor next to my sandals. I knew that, in the morning if I woke and the rock was there, I had not been dreaming. When I woke, the rock was there. So I knew it really happened."

"The next morning, he told me what he saw, but I did not remember. I always felt cheated that he remembered and I didn't," Mateo said.

"I think it was that night that I decided to be a priest. This Sky Man gave me such a feeling of trust, kindness, and love that I wanted to pass it on to others."

I have not seen Father Felipe since that initial meeting. It was obvious that his direction in life had been influenced by that fateful night when the Sky People visited his small, remote village. I was not surprised by the impact on his life. Others had told me stories about encounters that changed their lives. It seems learning that we are not alone in the universe results in major life changes.

Chapter 21
A City That Touches the Sky

According to the Popol Vuh, a historical narrative of the post-classic K'iche' Maya kingdom, Q'uq'umatz, a lord of great genius, was assisted by powerful spirits, in the founding of the city of Q'umarkaj, Guatemala. It once housed nine dynasties of the elite and contained twenty-three palaces. It was one of the most powerful Maya cities when the Spanish arrived in the region in the early 16th century. There is some disagreement as to whether Q'uq'umatz was a historical figure or a mythological figure. In any case, the founder of this city was definitely a genius with a vision unparalleled for his time.

It was in the city of Q'umarkaj that my driver, Mateo, told me of his encounter with the men from the stars.

On Sunday morning, when my driver had not arrived, Mateo convinced me to return to Q'uq'umatz. "I have something to show you," he said. "I should have shared it with you when we were there previously, but it is time. The modern-day Maya consider Q'umarkaj a sacred place," Mateo said. "Most likely we will see some folks from the village conducting ceremonies since it is Sunday."

As we moved closer to the ancient site, I remembered that Stephens and Catherwood made this journey by mule. Riding in an air-conditioned van was obviously a much easier alternative.

As we approached the ruins, an elder identifying himself as Alberto stopped us. He spoke briefly to Mateo, who explained that the elder was a practicing shaman who had felt a particular connection with me as he saw me approach. He wanted to describe to me my Nawai. Nawai is said to represent a person's mission or destiny in life. It was also supposed to give the recipient (in this case, me) an insight into how they could achieve the greatest fulfillment in life. I anxiously followed the elder as he led us to the top of a small hill. Mateo explained that the shaman chose this place because he felt close to the creator at this place. I watched as Alberto lit a fire in a ring. I realized it had been used often. According to Mateo, the fire was a necessary part of the

ceremony. As the fire reached for the sky, it received messages through prayers, which were in turn transferred to Alberto. I was amazed that he knew my mission of following in the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood without having any previous knowledge of me. Needless to say, I was impressed. "You will live a very long life and have many opportunities to make a difference in the world. The road you travel will be rewarding. The obstacles are many, but the people will feel comfortable with you. You will get what you come after. The Sky Gods smile upon you. You will be safe in your journey." After the ceremony I offered to pay him, but he rejected my offer. "Doctora, it is my pleasure to meet you. It is enough."

After saying goodbye to the elder shaman, we continued toward the ruins. The ancient city sat on a hilltop surrounded by steep ravines, a testament to the city's strategic wartime position.

"This is an amazing place," I said as I focused my camera on the Temple of Tohi.

"Last summer, I brought my family here for the weekend. We rented a room in Chichicastenango. On Sunday, my wife and children planned to go to the market in the city so I decided to come here alone. I left shortly before dawn. I liked to watch the mist rise above the treetops. As I sat here, exactly where I am sitting now, I saw a craft descend from the clouds and hover over the plaza." I looked in the direction he pointed. A couple with a small child was engaged in a private ceremony. "As I sat here and watched, two beings descended from the craft. I believe they were using some type of mechanized instrument, strapped to their back, to descend from the craft to the ground. For the longest time, I watched them. I am sure they were photographing the entire area. They both used a gloved hand and held it in front of them. Suddenly a third being appeared and proceeded to dig, or, at least, that is what I thought. The three of them kneeled around the spot and when they stood, one of them saw me. He pointed out my presence to the other two, who turned and looked in my direction. They immediately returned to the craft, stood underneath it, and ascended into the bottom of the hovering spaceship."

"Did they say anything? Could you hear them talking? What did they look like?"

"Dios mio! They were tall. The tallest men I have ever seen. Maybe eight or nine feet tall. They wore one-piece suits with two cylinders on their back. One emitted a steam-like substance, which I think was a propulsion system that

allowed them to exit and re-enter the craft. The other was probably a breathing apparatus because they never took off a helmet that engulfed their whole head and upper body. I did not get a good look at their faces—they were too far away—but they were humanoid and they were tall. I can swear to that."

"Do you remember anything else about them physically?"

"One thing: Their walk was strange."

"Please explain," I said.

"Their strides were long—three times that of an average man. But it was more than that, it was like when they walked, they did not touch the ground. It was only when they came to a stationery position that their feet seemed to touch the earth."

"What kind of clothing did they wear?"

"As I said, they had a helmet-like apparatus that covered their head and shoulders. Their suits appeared one piece; even the boots seemed connected. There was an insignia on the left shoulder, but I could not make it out. Their suits were a silver-gray, maybe more silver. Their gloves seemed to be more like equipment than gloves like humans wear. I think there were cameras embedded in them," Mateo said, staring into the distance.

"You said you think they dug up something?"

"I'm not sure. A third entity appeared with an instrument that appeared to be a digging tool, but when they were gone, I saw no evidence that they had dug in the ground. In fact, I did some of my own digging and found nothing."

"What happened when they returned to their craft?" I asked.

"They left, but later that morning I saw them again. It was near the bottom of the mountain. It was the same three beings, but this time the craft had landed. They were kneeling around an area. I was sure they were digging for something. For a while I stopped, but they seemed unconcerned about me. Then, as I watched, the three of them flew upward into the sky. They disappeared in the direction of the ancient city. At that point, I drove back to Chichicastenango and waited for my wife and children at the Maya Inn."

"That's an interesting story. Any theories about what they were doing?"

"If I had a quetzal for every time I have tried to figure out what they were doing, I'd be a rich man. I really have no idea. I do know they were not performing sacred rituals, which is common to see here."

"And you believe that the Maya are the descendants of the Sky Gods," I

said.

"As I have told you previously, I believe the space men or Sky Gods actually came here to colonize this planet. I believe we, the living Maya, are the descendants of the Sky People—that they came to settle the planet and we are their descendants." He paused for a moment, and then almost apologetically added, "It is only one man's theory—mine." He smiled. "What do you think of this city? Do you feel anything special?" Mateo asked.

"Even though the city lies in ruins, I feel a strong spiritual power in this place."

"You are my first client to recognize this power," he said. "We must be related."

I walked away from Mateo and stepped onto the floor of a roofless palace. I paused and looked at the candles, and the offerings of fruit, alcohol, beans, and corn left by the descendants of those who once occupied this magnificent city. Standing in the middle of the plaza, I whispered a prayer to the four directions. On the floor of the palace along with the other offerings, I left a small tobacco offering and a piece of quartz I once found in a riverbed in Montana.

Chapter 22
The K'iche' Village Women Tell Their Stories

Prior to Spanish invasion in the 16th century, Guatemala was the center of the Maya world. Even today, the majority of Guatemalan citizens identify themselves as Maya. Despite their majority, they have been ruled by a dynasty of Latin dictators, who have made them the most oppressed people of Mesoamerica. An estimated 200,000 Maya were murdered in the civil war between 1960 and 1996. Most were massacred in an organized and systematic fashion, while the world remained silent to their plight. The Guatemalan army carried out 626 massacres, and five Maya tribes in the mountainous areas were exterminated. The government's defense was based upon its racist ideology that the Maya, who were descendants of the Maya kingdom at the start of the 16th century, were inferior to the Latin people. The government suggested the Maya were lazy and primitive, and responsible for the country's poverty. The most inferior, according to this racist dogma, were "the mountain dwellers."

I am in the country of the mountain dwellers. It is a place where Americans are often regarded with suspicion and disdain. Given their experiences with American companies that have exploited them, and a U. S. government that has supported dictators in power, their attitude is understandable. Despite their plight, there is a glimmer of hope for the indigenous people of Guatemala. Women, in particular, have taken up the role of resistance. In this atmosphere I met some of those resilient Maya women, who, like their counterparts throughout Mesoamerica, have had unique encounters with UFOs. In this chapter you will read their stories.

After visiting the ancient K'iche' Maya city of Q'umarkaj we returned to the hotel and had lunch. Later Mateo took me on a tour of the city. Chichicastenango is a small, stucco-white town on the crests of mountaintops. The majority of the residents were K'iche' Maya and they spoke a dialect of the same name. The city, known as Chichi to the locals, is a bustling town of

narrow streets surrounding the 400-year-old church of Santo Tomás and the central market square, one of the largest in Guatemala.

"A woman alone, especially a foreigner, can be a target in Guatemala," Mateo cautioned as we walked the streets. "I am ashamed to say this. I love this country, but Guatemala is a dangerous place. Gangs roam city streets and main highways. There are many robberies and murders. Since your new driver has not arrived, I have decided to stay another night to make sure that he does come. If necessary, I will drive you to Mexico. I cannot allow you to make the trip alone."

"I appreciate that," I said, "but I don't like the idea of putting you at risk."

"You are family. It is no risk." I breathed a sigh of relief when Mateo decided to stay the night. It was a three-hour drive to Guatemala City and he could have made it before nightfall, but out of concern for my safety he decided to spend the night.

I joined him later that evening for dinner. He was smiling when I approached his table. "I have a special surprise for you," he said as I sat down. "I stopped in the bar this afternoon. A lady works here that my wife and I have known for years. She once stayed at our home in Guatemala City when her husband was in the hospital. I told her about you and why we are here. She told me she had an encounter with a UFO. She has agreed to talk with you about the event even though it happened a number of years ago. Before we eat, would you like to go meet her?" There was no need to answer. I picked up my handbag and pushed back my chair. I followed Mateo to his vehicle. "She lives outside the village and works in the kitchen at the restaurant. She comes in a 4 a.m. in the morning and goes home to her children at 4 p.m."

"That's a twelve-hour shift," I replied.

"But one of the better jobs in the community. She supports her family. Her husband is in a very bad way. He has terminal cancer and not long to live." We drove through the town and, near the outskirts leading to Santa Cruz del Quiché, Mateo parked the vehicle halfway on the sidewalk in front of a corrugated tin and concrete block shack. "According to the directions she gave me, this is where she lives," Mateo said, as he opened the van door for me. Before he could knock on the door, it swung open, and a young boy about six opened the door. He smiled and showed us into the dimly lit house.

"Angelina," Mateo said, "this is my friend and traveler from the USA. I told you about her interest in UFOs, and you said you would tell her your

story."

"Come with me." She led us through the two-room house into a small backyard area. As we passed through the living area, she pointed out her husband, who was lying in a hammock and watching a small black and white TV. Another male sat beside him in a wooden chair. When we entered the backyard, several women sat in a circle talking and eating. "These are my friends and family," she began. "They have stories, too." She offered me a chair and I sat. She turned to Mateo. "I have asked Edna to translate. She is an English teacher. Part of the conversation might be inappropriate for a male to hear." Mateo nodded, explained the situation to me, and disappeared inside the house.

Once Mateo was gone, Angelina was the first to begin. Because they spoke mostly K'iche' Maya, Edna translated. "I was gathering wood one day with my daughter. We were walking along the edge of the road, picking up small sticks. We saw a long object like a big gasoline tank fall out of the sky and drop to the ground. It did not make a sound. Both my daughter and I were surprised. Then we got scared and hid but we kept watching the tank. Two big men got out of it. They were twice as tall as me." I looked at Angelina. I would be surprised if she were more than four feet tall. "They saw us or sensed us because they came through the woods and took us." She paused and emptied a bottle of cerveza and offered one to me.

At that point, I interrupted and asked Edna to find out what she meant by saying "they came through the woods and took us." Edna explained to her my concerns and she explained that they lifted them up like dolls and carried them inside the strange tank.

"I was really afraid," she continued, "but they told me to be calm and they meant me no harm. I remember nothing after that, except we suddenly found ourselves on the side of the road watching the tank lift off the ground and climb to the clouds. We never saw it again. When we got home, we told Alfonzo what we saw but he told us we probably had too much sun and imagined it. I did not imagine it. It is not every day that a gasoline tank with men drop [s] out of the sky."

I looked at Edna. "Could you ask her to describe the men?" When Edna translated, Angelina looked at me and responded. "They were white, very white. They looked like they had never seen the sun. They were very tall and their suits hurt my body. As I struggled to get away, I grabbed onto the suit and

it made needles run through my whole body. I had to give up. I could not stand the pain. If my daughter were here she would tell you the same. They smelled funny too. Their whole tank smelled funny. I think that is the reason that I don't remember anything. I think the smell knocked me unconscious." When I asked Edna if she could describe the smell, she told her it was a smell unknown to her, and she had no words to describe it.

"Ask her about their faces," I said to Edna, "or any other thing she might remember."

Edna translated. "She said that they wore some kind of covering over their eyes but their faces were white. She remembers nothing else."

"I saw the same tank," a woman opposite Angelina spoke up. "I am Gloria. I live in the house two doors down. It has something to do with Q'umarkaj. That's why they come here. It was the home of the old ones and they come back to take what they left behind. I think they come and take the bones of the old ones home to their place in the sky. People have seen them digging up there. Several times people have come upon open grave sites. My grandfather once told me that he saw them dig up a skeleton, and that it came back to life and walked onto their machine with them and they flew away to the sky." I looked at Edna and she sensed my question. She asked Gloria to repeat her grandfather's story, but it remained the same. "I have been seeing giants visit the site since I was a child. They come and look around, dig, and then leave. They must be looking for someone they have not found. Until they find that skeleton, they will keep returning. My grandfather says that when they take the bones back to the sky, the bones come alive again."

"What does that mean?" I asked Edna.

"She means that the skeletons become alive again. She believes the aliens have the ability to become reborn."

"Can you describe them?" I asked.

"They are giants. They are twice as tall as Juan." She pointed to the other room where the short stout Maya man was watching TV with Angelina's husband. "They wore silver suits. But I never got close enough to describe them other than that. Maybe their relatives helped King Q'uq'umatz build the city and they have come to take him home. Maybe they don't die like we do on Earth. Maybe they really are the Gods of Heaven." I thought about Gloria's comments. Her suggestions for why the space men kept returning to the area was as plausible as any I could imagine.

“The Star Men took me aboard their space ship,” said Rosalie, the youngest woman of the group. “I was about sixteen at the time. I was with my boyfriend, Geraldo, one night. He was walking me home from the plaza. We saw a round craft hovering over the top of the buildings. Suddenly, we found ourselves being pulled upward. I screamed when my feet left the ground, and even though we twisted and struggled, we could not stop the upward movement. Neither of us remembered much. We were separated and although Geraldo tried to come with me he was forced into another area. I lost consciousness. Two weeks later I discovered I was pregnant, or at least I had all the symptoms of pregnancy. I was sick all the time. My belly grew almost every night, but I had never made love to anyone, and yet I was pregnant.”

“How did Geraldo feel about your pregnancy?” I asked.

“Geraldo believed me. He said it was a virgin birth like Mother Mary and that we should marry. He would take care of me and the baby. Two months later the UFOs came again. Suddenly I was no longer pregnant. No one ever knew but Geraldo. Now we think I was carrying a space man’s baby. It scared us a lot. When we went to the plaza we always came home with a group of friends or family. Never alone again.” I watched her rub her stomach as she told her story and saw the tears that formed in her eyes. “I know it was not Geraldo’s baby. I was a virgin. After that night, Geraldo and I got married. We tried to have children but we never did. I think they did something to me.”

“Edna, would you ask her if she has any recollection of going onboard a spacecraft the night she lost her baby?” I waited as Edna translated my question.

“I saw the spacecraft in the distance,” she said. “But I do not remember being taken again. Geraldo saw it, too. He was with me.”

“I did not have problems having children,” Carla said, easing the sadness that had descended upon the group, “but they kidnapped me and took me onboard their spacecraft. It happened when I was just newly married. I had walked to town to sell eggs at the market. On my way home it was getting dark, and I saw this ball of light streak across the sky. It frightened me, and I began to run. Suddenly the light circled me, and I could not escape. The light pulled me onboard their craft. I could see my village clearly. I could see my house and garden. I knew my husband would be worried, and I told them they must let me go or my husband would be worried and angry. They just stared at me curiously. Somehow, I understood that if I cooperated they would let me go

home. They were monstrous creatures. I let them do their will. They took my blood and samples of my skin and they opened my legs." She paused and spoke to Angelina in a subdued voice. It was apparent that she was embarrassed by the ordeal. Later Angelina explained that she believed that they had made her pregnant, too. The next day she felt life inside her, and yet she had had her menstrual cycle only days before and knew she was not pregnant. Two months later, she recalled being taken again, and when she woke, she knew her belly was empty.

"I was not abducted," Carla, the last of the group to speak, said. "I saw them, though. I was gathering wood one morning, and I came upon a craft like Angelina described. It looked like a gas tank. It was big. I thought it strange that this object was in the woods, and, as I got closer, I saw it lift off the ground and disappear into the sky. I did not see anyone—only the long silver tank. It was huge."

As the evening wore on, the women added no more details to their stories. They admitted that they rarely shared their stories with others for fear that they may be isolated within their communities. "Our people are superstitious," Angelina said. "They have little contact with the outside world. Only the market and then they do not talk to strangers. They still believe that a camera steals their souls and refuse to be photographed by tourists, so you must understand where they are coming from."

"I do appreciate their willingness to talk to me," I said. "Please thank them for me. I really appreciate their honesty."

As I started to leave, I asked the women if there was anything I could do for them. Rosalie asked me if I had lipstick. "I have always wanted lipstick," she said. I opened my bag and deposited lipsticks, sewing kits, fingernail polish, and small mirrors on the table in front of them. Each woman took what they wanted, and, although I offered to leave the unclaimed items, they told Mateo that I had been more than generous and that I should take the remaining items and gift them to others who had stories to tell. As each woman stood to shake my hand, I gave each one of them the equivalent of $50 American dollars. One woman embraced me and cried. The others explained they would use the money for dentists, doctors, or shoes.

On our way back to the hotel, Mateo commented that I had been very generous. "When I travel, I always bring boxes of items that I know women like. I keep them in my bag in case such an event occurs."

“It is still very generous. I have met researchers who never consider the time that people spend with them. The researchers consider their time valuable, but not the village people’s time.”

“The truth is, those items and the money are just tokens of appreciation. The women who told their stories are the generous ones.”

“You are right, Señora.” We drove the rest of the way to the hotel in silence and had dinner, and as we were planning to meet for breakfast the next morning, Emiliano, the driver I had contracted to drive me across the Mexican border and to San Cristóbal de las Casas, appeared at our table and introduced himself. There was a sadness in leaving Mateo. Over the prior two weeks, we had become more than client and guide; we had become friends who shared some incredible experiences. We agreed to keep in touch.

It has been ten years since I first met Mateo and we have kept that promise over the years. On two occasions, I have returned to Guatemala to visit him and his family. Although he is no longer in the tourist business, he often calls me to tell me another story he has heard about the Sky People.

Chapter 23
The Star Men of the Guatemalan Jungle

For centuries there have been legends of giants in the jungles of Guatemala. Creation stories reveal the first race on Earth were giants. There have been early accounts of giants among the indigenous populations of Mesoamerica. For example, Antonio Pigafetta, Ferdinand Magellan's assistant, detailed various encounters with giants in Magellan's Voyage: A Narrative of the First Circumnavigation. He wrote of encountering giants who were so tall that the sailors traveling with Magellan only came up to their waist. Throughout their encounters, the giants repeatedly pointed to the sky and wanted to know if Magellan came from there, indicating, perhaps, that they were accustomed to visitors from the stars.

In this chapter, an elder from a small, isolated, indigenous village told the story of giant Star Men who frequented the jungle and abducted women and children. His story put another spin on the giants from the sky.

"According to the villagers, Stephens and Catherwood hacked their way through the jungle near this very road," my driver, Emiliano, said, as we drove toward the Mexican border.

"I read that it was a harrowing trip," I said.

"When I was a boy, my grandmother told me that giants roamed these mountains. Their companions were white jaguars." He paused and slowed the van as he maneuvered a hairpin curve on the steep, mountainous Guatemalan road heading toward the Mexican border. "Some say the giants could wrench off the head of a man, swallow it, and spit out his soul like watermelon seeds. When that happened, you were doomed to wander the earth forever. Even today huge bones are found all over the jungle. The farmers believe they belong to the giants."

"Do you think they could be mastodon bones? An archaeologist told me that mastodons have been found in Guatemala."

"A French archaeologist at Utatlán claimed the large bones were from a

mastodon," he said, "but the people around here ignore him. They know the giants are real. They've seen them with their own eyes."

"Do you mean the giants still live in the jungle?" I asked.

"They're still here. From time to time people see them. They come to the villages—to steal women and make them have their babies. Then they go away, and we do not see them for a long time."

"These are myths, correct?" We slowed for a small village. We were so high in the mountains that we were driving in and out of the clouds.

"No Señora Doctora. No story. The real thing." Suddenly children appear and ran toward the van chanting: "Emiliano, Emiliano." He slowed and handed them hard candy and coins out the window of the van.

"Do you know those children?" I asked.

"Oh sí. My family lives in the valley below." Pulling to the side of the road, Emiliano continued. "You cannot see my village from here, but it is the place I was born, and the place I will die." I peered out the side of the van but the jungle below was too dense to see anything. "There is no highway to my village. No electricity. No television. People travel by horse or walk. That is the reason I keep my van in the city. My brother lives there. Otherwise I would be unable to work as a tour guide." As I peered over the side of the road, Emiliano released his seat belt and announced, "Señora Doctora, you will excuse me. I must go to my village. I left my guide's license at my house. I will not be able to escort you into Mexico without it." He turned off the engine and opened the door.

"How long will you be gone?" I asked, as I came around to his side of the vehicle.

"Not long. Maybe a half hour or so."

"Why didn't you tell me you didn't have your license with you when you agreed to take me to Mexico?" I asked.

"Señora, I needed the job. I will be back in a few minutes. I will leave the keys with you. Do not worry. No one travels this road."

"I don't feel comfortable staying here alone. Maybe I should go with you," I said.

"No, Señora. It is too difficult. The descent is treacherous. Once you descend into the valley, it is a hard climb back up to the highway. You will be fine. Few travelers pass this way." He retrieved a machete from behind the

driver's seat and closed the door. "It will not take long. You will wait for me." He handed me the keys and disappeared over the side of the road before I had a chance to launch further objections. I stood there in silence questioning my choice of Emiliano. He did not appear professional like the other drivers I had contracted. He could more easily pass for a rebel than a tour guide. His black hair was disheveled, his white shirt was unkempt, and his navy blue pants were worn with a white sheen from too many washings. I suspected he was telling me the truth. He needed the job. If his village was anything like those we had passed, the people lived in poverty.

I walked to the edge of the road where he disappeared and cautiously surveyed the harsh world around me. Below was a foliage-covered valley that spread out endlessly toward the horizon. The sun was venturing toward the south, swallowing the mist as the temperatures steadily climbed. All around, the drone of insects crested and receded as rhythmically as ocean waves. I understood how stories of giants could have been created in such an environment, and for a moment I imagined them lurking in the jungle.

I returned to the van, retrieved my journal, settled into a shady spot, and started to write. I had written no more than a half page when the familiar jungle sounds were interrupted by the indistinguishable sound of a horse's hooves on the road surface. I peeked out from behind my secluded spot and saw an elderly Maya male riding in my direction. He had a cartridge belt strapped across his shoulder, and a rifle balanced across his saddle horn. Two long leather straps held a machete down low by his side and ready for access. "Hola, Señor," I said.

"Hola," he said as he raised his hand in greeting. He dismounted and released his horse, which breathed painstakingly in the heat. I retrieved a bottle of cold water from the cooler and offered it to him.

"Usted habla espanol?" I asked. Do you speak Spanish?

"Sí," he replied. He told me his first language was Quichean-Mamean. I recognized it as the Mayan dialect that Emiliano spoke. Despite our linguistic differences, we used a combination of Spanish, hand signals, and English to communicate. He confirmed there was a village in the valley below, and confided that Emiliano was a distant cousin. As we chatted, I learned that his name was Chulin Pop. "It is a Maya name. No Spanish blood," he said. He told me that when he was twenty and a good-looking man, he crossed the border into Mexico and traveled to the USA, but that he did not like it there.

He was too lonesome; “solo, solo,” he said, shaking his head. “My cousin worked there, and I went there to work with him. It was much easier in those days to travel north. I never did find my cousin. I came home and never left my village again. That was forty-five years ago.”

I looked at him and imagined him a handsome man, but age and hard work had taken their toll. He was thin, almost gaunt, with skin the color of burnished leather. He wore a white cowboy hat, which set off the bronze of his skin. A sweat stain circled the head band. Although his pants and shirt were shabby, he wore a pair of cowboy boots with polished silver conchos. When I called him a caballero, the word in Spanish meaning a gentleman or, more literally, a gentleman on a horse, he smiled a wide grin. His front teeth were missing. He told me he called his horse “Cisco Kid” after the popular black and white 1950s American TV show.

“I watched The Cisco Kid on TV, too,” I said.

“Ah Pauncho,” he said, mimicking the popular Mexican-American TV cowboy.

“Ahhh Cisco,” I replied, mimicking the reply of Cisco’s sidekick. He rocked back and forth laughing.

I told him I was happy that he stopped. “I was a little nervous. My driver told me giants live in the jungle. Do you know those legends, too?” I asked. As I searched for another way to ask the question, I saw his body stiffen.

“Una serpiente!” He abruptly pulled me to my feet, dragging me away from the van. He pointed toward to the edge of the highway where a red, yellow, and black coral snake slithered away just inches from where we sat. I watched the snake glide into the dense jungle foliage. Chulin touched my arm reassuringly and pointed to my cowboy boots and smiled. He explained that I only needed to watch for the snakes on the ground. The ones in the trees were not so dangerous. Somehow, this information did not comfort me. I leaned against the van, bowed my head, wiped the sweat from my face with the tail of my t-shirt, and forced myself to breathe slowly and calmly.

As I struggled to think of more words of gratitude that this Maya elder might understand, he walked over to his horse and removed a strange, unfamiliar fruit from his saddlebag. He cut it in thirds, shared a piece with Cisco Kid, and offered a third to me. He explained that in the old days, the elders used this fruit in their ceremonies. “Proteccion,” he said pointing to the fruit. I ate the bitter fruit while at the same time thinking I could use a little

protection. Afterward, we sat in the shade of the van and sipped bottles of cold water.

"I am collecting stories about giants, Sky People, and little people," I explained. "Do you have any stories that you would be willing to share with me?"

He nodded and took another drink of water. "Sí."

"I may use the stories in a book at some time in the future. Do you mind if I tape your stories?" I asked, showing him my small tape recorder and then demonstrating it to him. He laughed at the sound of his voice and reached for the tape recorder, turning it over in his hands, and then returned it to me. "It helps me remember every word you say," I explained. "That way, if I do write a book, I will tell your story accurately."

"Sí. You may use your machine and you are welcome to write about my story." He paused, took off his cowboy hat, rested it on one knee, and wiped his brow with a perfectly ironed handkerchief he pulled from his pocket. "The giants have always been here," he said. "They have always visited these mountains. They are powerful. We never—how do you say, interfere?"

"Yes. Interfere."

"Sí. We never interfere with them. We never spend the night on the tips. We always try to get to the valley before dark."

"Are you saying the giants live on the mountain peaks?" I asked.

"Sí y no. They come from the stars in their big silver plates and they stay here sometimes for only a night; sometimes for a week or more. They take the women and make them have their babies. They have four fingers and no thumbs. Any man who tries to defend his women is sick for days. They have great powers. They make you hear words, but they never speak. They have weapons that make rocks and things disappear."

"Are you saying that these giants come from the stars?"

"Sí. The giants are the Sky Men. They come from the stars."

"What do they look like, these men from the stars?"

"They are giants. Maybe this tall," he said, as he stood and raised his arms to measure against the van.

He was describing a creature that was between seven and eight feet tall. "Have you seen these Sky Men?" I asked.

"Oh sí. Muchas veces. Oh yes, many times."

"Can you describe them? Puede describirlas?"

"Oh sí. Llegan bien entrada la noche." He said they come late at night. "They come from the sky and they land on the mountains tips [tops]. How you say, mountain tips? I don't know the word."

"En la cima de la montana," I suggested. "On the mountain tops."

"Sí, en la cima de la montana. They come from the stars in machines that make no sound. I have seen their lights many times. I always send my wife and children inside when I see them. I have heard that in the old days, they stole women. They steal children, too. In another village they took a boy and girl last year. They returned them, but the children are not good."

"What do you mean the children are not good?" I asked.

"They do not want to go outdoors. They don't talk much. They don't play with their brothers or sisters or cousins. They changed them."

"Have you ever seen the giants up close?"

He looked at me as though he did not understand. "Que tan cerca ha estado con ellos?" I repeated the question in Spanish: Have you ever seen the giants up close?

He nodded and pointed to himself and then to a bend in the road. I estimated the distance was a hundred feet. "Did they see you?" I asked.

"Oh sí, but I run. Run very fast. The giants have shiny suits that—how you say, brilla a la luz de la luna?"

"Glistens in the moonlight?"

"Sí. Glistens. That is the word."

"Can you tell me anything else about the giants from the stars?"

"We never go on the mountains at night. It is impossible to find a man from our village who would spend the night in these mountains. It is not a good place at night."

"Can you tell me anything about their craft?" I asked. He looked at me bewildered. "Nave espacial," I explained. "Spacecraft."

He nodded knowingly. "They have bright lights. Rojo y blanco, muy brillantes luces." He described red and white lights that were very bright. "The spacecraft—nave especial—is round. Gigante. Bigger than my village. It is silver with bright lights."

"Can you tell me anything else about the sky men?" I asked.

"Nada," he replied as he looked upward at the sky, and explained that the sun was walking to the west and that he must go hunting. He said he would return when the sun sets, and if I was still there, he would take me home to his wife. He said that I could not stay on the mountain at night. He mounted his horse, turned, and saluted me with his cowboy hat. His horse reared in the air and stood on his two hind legs. Chulin shouted, "Adios" and then he was gone like the cowboys of the golden-day, Hollywood movies. I stood in awe of this remarkable man who came into my life at the most unexpected time. Without a doubt, he was one of the most interesting persons I had ever met, and yet I realized I would probably never see him again.

I looked at my watch. More than two hours had passed since Emiliano left me beside the road. I picked up my journal, rewound the small tape recorder, and listened to Chulin Pop's story several times, transcribing word for word our conversation about the giants from the sky. Just as I finished writing, Emiliano emerged from the jungle. In one hand he carried the machete and in the other the remains of a dead coral snake.

"Hola, Señora Doctora," he said. "Siento que me haya tomado tanto tiempo." He apologized for taking so long. He held the snake upward for my inspection in machismo panache, and then hurled it into the jungle. Without further explanation, he climbed behind the steering wheel and turned the key in the ignition. I climbed in beside him. He hung his guide's license from a chain on the rearview mirror with a plastic Virgin Mary figurine that already swung there. Neither of us murmured a word. We sat in silence for a few seconds and enjoyed the cool air blasting from the air-conditioner. At that moment, it did not matter that a few minutes in this part of the world could mean anything from a half hour to twenty-four. I was on the trail of Stephens and Catherwood, giants, and Sky Men. Nothing was going to dampen my spirit.

"Esta preparada?" Emiliano asked.

I looked down at my cowboy boots and smiled. "Sí," I replied. "I'm ready."

PART IV

Walking With the Ancients: Exploring Mexico

In their zeal to reach Palenque, Stephens and Catherwood never ventured to San Cristóbal. It was Christmas Eve when Emiliano and I arrived in San Cristóbal, a city that could only be described as Maya country. Indigenous people dressed in colorful garments of purples, blues, greens, yellows, and reds, were everywhere and made up most of the population on the streets. American hippies from the ’60s drank coffee at outdoor cafes while European travelers crowded the narrow streets. The weather was cool, but, coming from Montana, it was a reprieve from the heat of Guatemala.

The city was a hodgepodge of colonial mansions converted to hotels, coffee shops, Internet cafes, indigenous handicraft stores, amber shops, and small restaurants. I stayed in a downtown hotel and was given the “El Presidente Suite.” It was the only room in the entire hotel with windows. At best it was a one-star hotel, but it was a good location, less than a block from the town square and the heart of the city.

Emiliano and I said our goodbyes over coffee at one of the small outdoor cafes and then he left, to begin his trip home to Guatemala. He wanted to be with his family by Christmas morning. I unpacked and after dinner in my room I fell asleep.

I spent the next four days in San Cristóbal, exploring three sites, and then headed for Oaxaca City, a nine-hour drive, passing through fourteen toll booths and twelve military checkpoints. The topography varied from extreme inclines, long curvy highways, and fertile river valleys. Hillsides peppered with Saguaro cactus and palm trees, fields of agave under cultivation on steep hillsides, and small tequila distilleries were interspersed throughout the drive. In Oaxaca City I stayed in a former convent that had been converted to a five-star hotel. I used this location to visit several ancient Zapotec sites. Everywhere I went, from the small villagers to the ancient cities, I collected

stories from the local people about Sky Gods, aliens, and UFOs.

After two weeks in San Cristóbal and Oaxaca City, I retraced my steps to continue my plan to follow in Stephens and Catherwood footsteps. The highway between San Cristóbal and Palenque was a narrow, mountain road littered with 210 topes (speed bumps) making the 125-mile trip rather miserable. The pine forests appeared as though they might have during Stephens's day, but it was not long before the landscape changed. Houses and cornfields were interspersed throughout the region where the trees had been cut for planting. On more than one occasion children ran out as the vehicle approached and held a rope across the highway, asking for a "donation" for the Church. Stopping each time and "donating" a few pesos along with lollipops, cookies, and buffalo jerky brought glee to the faces of the Maya children but made the trip even longer.

The further my driver and I drove into the mountains of the Chiapas, the poorer the settlements became. This area was also well known for its problems with smuggling. Both drugs and illegal immigrants poured over the border from Guatemala into Mexico. For all of these reasons there was a very large Mexican military presence in the region. We were stopped at several military checkpoints but all they wanted to know was where we were coming from and where we were going. Some searched our vehicle, opening suitcases. One copied the name on my passport. In every case, I found the young soldiers to be extremely courteous and almost apologetic for the inconvenience they were creating.

We stopped in Ocosingo briefly as we made a detour to visit the ancient city Toniná. Modern-day Ocosingo was unlike the beautiful, peaceful town described by Stephens, but was a dirty, dusty town with road construction everywhere. We stopped briefly at the plaza. Stephens described a large Ceiba tree in the center of the square, but it was gone. They visited Toniná in 1840 on their way to Palenque. We pulled off the main highway leading toward Palenque and followed the route to Toniná, which was about eight miles from town. After Toniná, we continued our journey to Palenque encountering one switchback after another, as we descended into a lush, jungle with waterfalls and streams. We arrived in Palenque town by nightfall. That night my driver and I had dinner together. He planned to return home to San Cristóbal the next day.

After twenty-eight days in Palenque, it was Stephens's intention to continue

his explorations into the Yucatan. They stopped in Merida, home to 20,000 people—a far cry from the million people who inhabited the present-day city. After a time of rest, the explorers set out for Uxmal. Catherwood and Stephens made one trip to the ancient city, but by the next morning Catherwood had another violent attack of fever and Stephens became extremely concerned for his health. He made immediate plans to leave Mexico. On July 31 they arrived in New York City, three days shy of ten months.

After the success of Stephens's first book, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán, and he and Catherwood's unquenched desire to explore the Yucatan, the two adventurers decided to return to Mexico. For their second trip, Stephens and Catherwood sailed from New York on October 9, 1841. They were joined on that voyage by Dr. Samuel Cabot, a Boston surgeon and amateur ornithologist. On October 27, they lay anchor off the coast of Sisal, the port city of Merida. During their second expedition they visited nearly thirty ancient sites. On May 18, 1842, Stephens and Catherwood left Mexico, arriving in New York on June 17, 1842. It was to be their last trip to Mesoamerica.

From 2003 to 2010, I made multiple trips to Mesoamerica—fourteen in all—often staying a month or more. After my retirement from Montana State University I was freer to spend more time in exploration of the sites and talking with the local people. I explored all of the ancient sites visited by the explorers. The stories in this section, unlike the stories in the previous three, take place over an eight-year period. You will note that during these eight years I often employed different drivers/guides to accompany me.

During my travels in Mexico, I made multiple trips to most of the sites visited by Stephens and Catherwood, always discovering something new along the way and collecting more stories. The narratives in this section are not in chronological order, but are grouped according to location.

Although the stories collected for this book ended in 2010, I have continued my search among the Maya. What began as a teenager's dream became a passion. It was there, among the ancient ruins of the Maya, that my life changed significantly. It was in Mexico that I heard some of the most remarkable UFO encounters of my travels. In this section, I share many of those stories.

Chapter 24
In the Land of the Tuhohani

Casa Na Bolom, House of the Jaguar, was the home of archeologist Frans Blom, a French archeologist, and his wife, Gertrude, a documentary photographer, journalist, and environmental pioneer. The house is located in San Cristóbal and today operates as a hotel, museum, and research center operated by the Asociación Cultural Na Bolom, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of the Lacandon Maya and the Chiapas rainforest. The house was purchased in 1951 by the couple, who met by chance in 1943 on a remote airstrip in the Lacandon rainforest, which stretches along the Mexico-Guatemala border. Both were pursuing their passions. His was the ancient Maya. Hers was anthropology and the Lacandon Indians, a remote group descended directly from the ancient Maya.

The Lacandon are the only Maya who managed to escape Spanish colonization. They lived so far into the dense jungle that the Spaniards could not penetrate the vegetation and never found them. They still live the old way, far removed from non-indigenous cultures. They wear white, gown-like, unshaped clothing that falls between their knees and ankles. Their long, flowing, black hair distinguishes them from other indigenous people in Mexico, who have adopted the Western male way of dressing. They still perform the ancient ceremonies of their people.

Today Casa Na Bolom is packed full of the Bloms' work, including photographs, archaeological finds, a 9,000-volume library devoted to the indigenous people, and three magical organic gardens. Gertrude, who passed in 1993, remained an advocate for the Lacandon Maya and worked to protect them and their way of life long after her husband died in 1963.

At Casa Na Bolom I happened to meet a Lacandon Maya and his son who told me that extraterrestrials still walk freely on their land. They call them the Tuhohani, the people from the stars.

On Christmas morning, I met Benito, my new driver/guide, at the San Cristóbal Hotel restaurant for breakfast to outline our itinerary over the next

two weeks. I had been in contact with Benito prior to leaving Montana. He was a self-identified Mestizo: part Mixtec, part Mexican. Benito was a university graduate and a teacher. He earned extra money during holidays and summers by escorting tourists around the region. He had sent me a photo of himself via e-mail, so I recognized him the moment he walked into the restaurant. He looked like a miniature cowboy from the top of his black cowboy hat to the tip of his snake-skin, Western boots. I estimated that he stood no more than an inch or two more than five feet tall, but his boots made him appear taller than he really was. He could have easily passed for thirty-something, although he admitted to celebrating his 50th birthday only three days earlier. His straight, black hair was parted in the middle and framed his round, brown face, which was accentuated with a perpetual smile. He wore black jeans, a starched, short-sleeved white shirt, and a large gold watch with too many dials to count. He said it was a gift from his wife and, although it no longer worked, he wore it as a symbol of their life together.

On Christmas evening, Benito, who lived with his aging parents, invited me to join his family for dinner. His daughter, Maria, and son, Jaime, were home from the university where Maria was studying to be a teacher and Jaime was studying engineering. That night, I learned that Benito was a widower. His wife died of tuberculosis shortly after Maria's birth. She was only twenty-nine. A candle-lit mantle in the lounge displayed numerous photos of her. From the moment I met him, I knew that I had made a wise choice. Benito was a respectful family man and we shared common interests; he was a teacher and had also encountered UFOs several times in his lifetime. We would spend the next two weeks together exploring San Cristóbal and Oaxaca before backtracking to Palenque.

The day after Christmas was a "down day" for me. I needed rest from the non-stop travel, and being alone allowed me to explore the indigenous city alone. Located at a height of almost 7,200 feet, San Cristóbal is the crown jewel of the state of Chiapas. Surrounded by forests of pine and oak, the city has a colonial atmosphere, with buildings painted in shades of pastel yellow, orange, blue, and purple. The narrow cobblestone streets with whitewashed walls and tree-filled plazas made it easy to walk around the city. The Zocalo, the main square, was the focal meeting place for locals and tourists. Live music, food stalls, street performances, indigenous women and children selling hand-woven bracelets, belts, and shawls, was an evening event.

Numerous indigenous villages, extending deep into the mountains

surrounding the city, were central for doing business and obtaining outside supplies. Ten Mayan dialects were spoken in the highland communities surrounding San Cristóbal. The villages, with their own identity, were an anthropologist's textbook with traditions dating back to pre-Conquest times. Each village had its own unique laws, dress codes with respect to colors, and designs, crafts, languages, and patron saints. For example, people did not marry outside their community, and if they did, they were expelled from their communities. Independent travelers, especially females, were uncommon in these villages and were looked upon with suspicion.

The day after Christmas, Benito drove me to the Maya Medicine Museum and Casa Na Bolom. The Maya Medicine Museum was created by the Council of Traditional Healers and Midwives of Chiapas to preserve their work and wisdom. It is located on the grounds of Casa Na Bolom. A lack of Western medicine in the rural highlands of southern Chiapas led to a revival of Maya herbal remedies and the knowledge of local plants and their uses for healing. In response, the museum invited local shamans to document and disseminate their knowledge and its related healing practices. Five halls in the colonial mansion were dedicated to each of the five main areas of Mayan medicine: herbs, pulsing, bone setting, mountain praying, and midwifery. Five types of traditional healers: herbalistas (herbalists), parteras (midwives), hueseros (those who work with bones), pulseros (pulse readers), and rezadoros (those who pray) operated out of the museum. An on-site pharmacy of hundreds of herbal medicines, dried for use in teas as well as combined as tinctures and salves, were available for purchase.

I spent a half day at the museum consulting with the in-house shaman. Before leaving the museum I purchased traditional medicines for a number of human conditions, including various herbal teas guaranteed to ensure a long and thriving life. After visiting the museum and pharmacy, I walked to Casa Na Bolom. I read that the public was invited to dine in the original dining room hosted by Franz and Trudy Blom before their passing. Because Francois Mitterand, Frieda Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera, and even Henry Kissinger had dined at Na Bolom, I made reservations for dinner.

When Benito and I arrived at 7 p.m. we were taken on a brief tour of Na Bolom, and then led to the dining room table that was intended for a group of thirty. The table was set for four: a Lacandon father, Balam, and Bol, his pre-adolescent son, and Benito and me. Balam and Bol spoke Spanish and the father even spoke a smattering of English. During the course of the evening,

Bol told me that the world would end when the last Lacandon died. Balam said the Lacandon traditions were important, otherwise the people would become drunks and burn down the forest like the Ladinoes (a common reference to non-indigenous Mexicans).

As the evening wore on, I shared with Balam my research and why I was traveling around Oaxaca. He told me how, on many New Year's Eves in his small village, the Sky Gods came to visit. "They come on a ray of light," he said. When I questioned him further, he told me, "They float from the sky on a light and when they leave, they return the same way. It is a wide beam of light," he repeated.

"What do they do when they come to your village?"

"They get medicine from the healers. It is something they do every year. My father called them 'the people who guided us here.' He says now they come back to learn from us about the medicines. In the old days, before coming to Earth, they were our teachers. They taught the people about the universe—today they just come to warn about the dangers of radiation, pollution, and the destruction of the climate, and collect medicines. Sometimes they go into the jungle and collect plants. They are preserving them in case the Earth is destroyed. We call them the Tuhohani, the people from the stars."

"Do you think the Earth will be destroyed?" I asked.

"This is the fourth world, Señora. It has been destroyed before. Each time, people were careless with the Earth. There is a reason why we are here. We were placed on this planet to look after it. We have been allowed to evolve as a people, but we have not been able to perform the task given to us. A day is coming when we must answer for our disregard of our mission. On that day, the Earth will be turned upside down."

"How do you know these things?" I asked.

"They tell me. The Mayan language is the language of the Tuhohani. That's what they speak, too. They warn us that we must prepare for the future. You should go home and prepare. I have a place for my family underground. If you are here when the Earth renewal occurs, you will stay with my people."

"When you see the Tuhohani, are they different from you and me?" I asked.

"They look like us for most part, although some are taller and fairer. They speak our language, but they only communicate with the healers."

"Can you describe their spaceships?" I asked.

"I have seen two kinds and two different peoples. One was like a long tank, like this pen, only bigger." He placed a ballpoint pen on the table. "It was big. And out of it came tall, white men with white suits and helmets like motorbikers wear. I think they were very white. Another ship was circular. It made no sound. It was silver. Smaller men in silver suits got out of it. They were like me," he said, touching his chest. "They are those who brought us here."

"When the Earth is destroyed, do you believe that is the end of the planet?"

"There will be a fifth world. The fourth world will be cleansed and those who survive will have another chance. The Tuhohani will be here to help those survivors begin a new world. This will be our last chance to make things right with the Earth and to fulfill our tasks."

"Do you believe the Lacandon will be among the Earth's survivors?" I asked.

"We are the caretakers of Earth. We will survive." We sat for another hour after the table was cleared and talked about the apocalyptic prophecy. Before long a waiter appeared announcing that the dining room would close in ten minutes.

Reluctantly, I left Na Bolom and the Lacandon father who shared with me some of their most sacred beliefs and prophecies. I have returned to Na Bolom three times. Unfortunately I never connected with Balam or Bol again. One of the workers told me that Balam only visits San Cristóbal once or twice a year.

Chapter 25
Sky Gods in the Heart of the Chiapas

Chinkultic is a moderate-sized archeological ruin in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. It is part of Lagunas de Montebello National Park. When Stephens and Catherwood crossed into Mexico, they camped in the village of Comitan, which was called Balun Canan, the Place of Nine Stars, by the Maya prior to the Spanish invasion. Chinkultic is about thirty-five miles from Comitan; however, Stephens and Catherwood never passed that way.

The site made national news in October 2008 when six local Indians were killed at a demonstration at the site. They were a part of an indigenous group demanding to take part in managing the archaeological site, which was managed by the National Institute of Archaeology. At the time of my visit in December 2008, the site was officially closed.

In this chapter, you will meet a young indigenous boy who tells stories of Sky Gods who have visited the site since his grandfather's day.

In 2008 I returned to the Chiapas. By e-mail, I had again made arrangements with Benito, who would be my guide for the next several days. I arrived at Tuxtla Gutierrez International Airport in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mexico, the capital city of the state of Chiapas, on the afternoon of December 10. In contrast to the rest of Chiapas, it is a modern, bustling city with beautiful hotels. We drove to San Cristobal, where I spent the night. The city had not changed during my four-year absence. After dinner with Benito's family, we returned to the city, took a walking tour, and spent two hours at the Zocalo enjoying the evening entertainment.

On December 11, we set out for Chinkultic. On our way Benito warned me that the ancient city had been the site of bloodshed. Despite its remoteness, Chinkultic had made international news only a few weeks before my arrival. It was the site of a battle between the state and federal police and local villagers. According to various reports, the villagers from La Trinitaria, who believed that INAH (National Institute of Anthropology and History) was neglecting the site, occupied it on September 28, 2008. In the process, the villagers

successfully apprehended, detained, and disarmed some seventy-seven policemen who had been sent to arrest the occupation's ringleaders. A month later, the state and federal police entered the village to rescue their officers, weapons, and the site itself. During the course of action, six villagers were killed and seventeen were wounded.

A few miles from the site, several men appeared on each side of the road and raised a chain across the highway, forcing us to come to an abrupt stop. They demanded fifty pesos to pass through their village in order to get to the archaeological site, claiming they owned the road. Although we knew it was a public highway and we had every right to pass without paying fees, we paid the five dollars without protest.

When I arrived at the site a ten-foot chain-link gate closed off the entrance. As I stood there considering the odds of scaling the fence, a young indigenous boy named Diego, astride a rusty bicycle, appeared and offered to be my guide.

"Where did you learn to speak English?" I asked.

"From the sisters [Catholic nuns] who work with the women and babies, and from American tourists. The gringos say I speak good English," he said, with a broad, proud smile.

"Your English is very good," I replied. "But how can we get into the site?" I asked, pointing to the sign with large letters declaring No Pasar. In other words, no trespassing. He shook his head and smiled.

"Follow me, Señora," Diego said. He guided me along the side of the fence to a stand of low-lying shrubbery. He lifted the fence, and I crawled under. He followed. Benito brought up the rear, but I noticed that he appeared somewhat apprehensive.

Although the site was quite large, little effort had been made to restore the ancient city. The grounds were totally abandoned. There was no military, government, or local presence. Chinkultic contained some 200 mounds grouped into six clusters, but the locals were correct: Little effort had been put into restoring the site. We wandered the grounds for approximately three hours while my young guide pointed out spots of particular interest including the remains of several small temples and a series of stelae that depicted Chinkultic's rulers celebrating victories over captives.

We climbed to the top of the Acropolis, a massive pyramid set on the side of the mountain. The site itself was awe-inspiring, and the view was

magnificent. The Maya knew how to take advantage of the natural terrain to provide for both defense and aesthetic beauty. Below was a sacred cenote, a natural sinkhole filled with water.

"You can almost see forever up here," I said, thinking out loud.

"Yes. At night it is magnify."

"Magnify?"

"You know, beautiful, amazing," my companion responded smiling.

"Yes. Magnificent," I replied and Diego repeated the word a number of times memorizing the correct adjective. Several times throughout the day, he used a word to confirm the accurateness of the usage.

"I've seen UFOs from here at night," he said.

"Really?" I responded. "I bet you can see lots of things from here. I am not surprised."

"If you like, we could stay tonight and we will watch. It is very nice here at night. The sounds of the night are like music." I looked at my youthful companion. Even though his invitation was appealing, I saw Benito shake his head and frown. I understood that he felt it was not safe.

"Maybe, the next time," I said.

"You will not come back," he responded. I heard the disappointment in his voice and looked at Benito again, who shook his head, impressing upon me that I should not stay. "No one ever comes back to Chinkultic. You will be sorry, though. You might have seen a UFO or many of them," he said. "Sometimes they come on balls of light and sometimes they appear from nothing."

"I don't understand."

"Sometimes they are invisible and then appear from nowhere." I understood him to mean the ships are invisible and that they suddenly appear for the eye to see.

"When my grandfather was a boy, about my age [Diego was twelve], he told me that UFOs often descended into the cenote. This cenote is the only one in the Chiapas," he said.

"Did your grandfather tell you what they were doing in the cenote?" I asked.

"He said they came to retrieve the treasures left behind by the Dioses del cielo, the Sky Gods, and that they had the ability to walk around under the

water to retrieve the objects."

"How did your grandfather know that?" I asked.

"I don't know. Maybe he told me but I don't remember."

"Is your grandfather still alive?" I asked.

"No. He died last winter. Weak heart, Mama said. Sometimes he told me they came to rest after their long voyage. He said he saw them sometimes, but they never came into the village."

"Did anyone else know about the visits from the Dioses del cielo?" I asked.

"When my grandfather was a young man, the government arrived in helicopters, drained the cenote into a nearby lake, and excavated the bottom. Some say they were looking for signs of the Dioses del cielo. Others say they were looking for treasures. My grandfather said they found nothing."

"Did your grandfather believe they were looking for signs of the Sky Gods?" I asked.

"Sí. They came into the villages and asked the people if anyone had ever searched the cenote for ancient things."

"Did your grandfather tell them what he saw?"

"None of the villagers said anything. They all said they knew nothing. The people would never betray the Dioses del cielo, especially not to the government. My people do not trust the government."

I sat at the top of the Acropolis with Diego admiring the ancient site. "They come from that direction," he said pointing off toward the mountains in the west. "Sometimes one, sometimes more. My grandfather said they like to visit. They like the Earth. He said that one time they lived here, but they went back to the stars. Perhaps life was too hard for them, or maybe they missed their home. I heard one of our wise men say that the Dioses del cielo guided us here, and then they went back to the stars and left us here. If they had stayed, maybe life would be different."

"Why do you think that?" I asked.

"When they left, they took with them all the knowledge about life. They planned to return, but when the Mexicans [Spaniards] came, the Dioses del cielo never came back. We were left alone to survive. That is the only thing we know. We know how to survive. When the world ends, we will be the ones who survive. The gringos tell me that they would never be able to survive the

way my people live." I listened to this young man who was far too wise for his age and did not speak for several minutes. "I believe when the next world comes, life will be easier for us. There will be no Mexicans. Only the Maya."

"When the Sky Gods visit today, do they ever talk to the people?" I asked.

"My grandfather said they sometimes gave warnings about things to come. They said we are living in a very dangerous time when the Earth will change."

"What kind of change?" I asked.

"I don't know, Señora. Only the old ones know and they do not talk about it, at least not in front of me. I only know that it will be a big change."

"Did your grandfather say it was going to be a big change?"

"Yes. He told my older brother not to go to the USA. He says that everyone should stay home. Mexico is safer than the USA. That is all, Señora. I know nothing else."

When we returned to the car, I gave Diego $50 American dollars. His smile told me he was very pleased with his tip. "This will pay for my brother to go to school for a year," he said smiling. I asked him if other tourists used his services. He said I was the seventh tourist this week but I was the most generous of all. "Another gringo gave me $20. Gringos are generous people. I like gringos." When I asked him how long he had been sneaking people into the site, he said that he had only been there a few weeks. "For a while the villagers kept the site open, but then the government closed it. That's when I took over. I come here every day and wait. Most people who come are too afraid to go into the site. They are afraid of the police and soldiers. Gringos don't care. They are the bravest and then the French," he said. I admired his entrepreneurship and wondered why the government could not use the resourcefulness of the local villagers to keep the site open. Even though it is off the beaten path, there are those individuals who seek out the more remote sites that are less touristy.

Before leaving Chinkultic, Diego, Benito, and I sat in the shade of a tree overlooking Aqua Azul, the blue water cenote. We were not anxious to say goodbye. Diego practiced words and sentences in English with me as we drank Cokes from my cooler and ate chicken sandwiches prepared by the hotel restaurant. Before I left the site, I gave Diego a bag of huckleberry taffy to share with the children of his village. He clutched it like a prized possession. "When you come back, Señora, bring me a copy of the book you write. I want to see my story and name in a book." As we pulled out of the site, I looked

through the rear window. Diego was standing amidst the dust waving at me with a smile I will never forget.

I think of Diego often. Like he predicted, I have not made it back to Chinkultic, but I am currently planning a return trip to Mexico. Chinkultic and Diego are on my list. Today the site is open to the public. It may be harder to take Diego up on his offer to spend the night, but I will find out on my next trip to the Chiapas.

Chapter 26
Our Elders Were Friends With the Wise Men

Accounts of luminous orbs and beings suddenly appearing out of thin air are not new. There have been many reports of such phenomena during my travels. These incidents are most often described in concert with the appearance of UFOs.

Luminous orbs are very familiar to indigenous peoples. Accounts of radiant orbs transforming into UFOs have been reported on many occasions. Reports of glowing orbs shapeshifting into star beings are fairly common among American Indian encounters; appearances of the brilliant dancing orbs during ceremonies have also been described. Hopi dancers are often visited by shimmering globes. The Cherokee claim luminous balls have been seen in their homeland since ancient times. The legend has it that the lights are the wives and mothers of warriors looking for their loved ones. The Shuar Indians in the Amazon report being visited by their ancestors who appear in the night skies as luminous white or blue spheres. The Shuar do not differentiate among ancestors or UFOs or themselves. They perceive them as the same; all ultimately are us.

In this chapter, you will meet Rodrigo, an elderly Zapotec Indian, who told me a story of the luminous orbs that once visited the elders of his people.

On my fourth day in San Cristóbal, Benito and I left early in the morning for the trip to Oaxaca City. It was a nine-hour, laborious drive to the infamous city, known more for the Zapatista rebels and the violence that often came with the rebel movement. One night, as I sat in the inner courtyard of a small, boutique hotel in Oaxaca City, Mexico, an elderly man, who was the groundskeeper, sat down on a bench next to me. “I have seen you around several days, Señora. How long are you staying?”

“About ten days.”

“It’s good to take your time and enjoy our beautiful city.” His straight, black

hair streaked with an occasional strand of white was pulled back into a small ponytail. His dark, rugged facial features reminded me of a 1950s Western movie star. As I tried in vain to recall the actor's name, I watched my companion curiously. I had seen him around the hotel on many occasions during my stay. Had it not been for his dark blue jumpsuit, the uniform of the male hotel workers, I would have thought he owned the hotel. He seemed to be involved in every aspect of the management, yet I overheard him tell another guest that he was the gardener. "Thank you for choosing our hotel. We are small, but very proud of our service. If you ever need anything, just call for Rodrigo. I will take care of everything."

"I am very happy here at the hotel. My room is wonderful. The food is great and I love your city, the ancient sites, and the chocolate," I said, emphasizing the word chocolate. A smile crossed his face at the mention of chocolate.

"Oh sí, the chocolate. This is the city of chocolate."

"The city smells of chocolate. Too much temptation." The elderly man slapped his knees and laughed, shaking his head.

"It is true. Women love chocolate," he said.

"I am no exception," I replied. He smiled and winked as if I had shared a special secret with him.

"Have you come for the ancient sites or the chocolate?" he teased.

"I have come to see the ancient sites, and to talk to people about ancient legends of Star People and Sky Gods—and for the chocolate."

"Ah, the Star People. We have many stories. May I ask, where have you visited?" he asked.

"I spent two days at Monte Alban, and one day at Mitla and Yagul. I went to see the tree at Tule. I have been visiting some of the outlying villages."

"Most people come and go and see nothing. There is power here if you are open to it."

"I feel the spirituality. It is everywhere."

"Very interesting. We will talk again." He stood and walked away. I caught a waiter's attention, ordered a bottle of water, and moved to a table in the corner of the hotel plaza. I watched as the elderly man wandered the area removing dead flowers and leaves from the carpet-like lawn area. After he finished, he moved toward my table.

"Tomorrow—with your approval, of course—I will take you to the place

that sells the best chocolate in all of Oaxaca City," he said.

"Thank you. I would love to go with you."

"And tonight, if you would like to join me for dinner, I can tell you about the star travelers," he said. "Shall I pick you up at 7?" he asked.

"Seven is perfect."

Promptly at 7 p.m., a knock came on the door of my room. I opened it and Rodrigo stood there, dressed in black dress pants and a white short-sleeved shirt that was a common attire of men in the city. His hair appeared as though he had just visited a barber. "Have you eaten at the Casa Oaxaca Restaurant?" he asked.

"No. I haven't had a chance yet."

"Good. I have reserved a rooftop table for privacy. It offers a wonderful view of the Santo Domingo Church. I think you will enjoy it. And we will be able to talk there."

We walked arm-in-arm a few blocks to the restaurant. The city was alive with vendors and people of all ages. The women nodded and the men slightly bowed as we made our way along the streets. Everyone, even children, stepped aside and cleared the sidewalk as we passed by. There did not appear to be anyone who did not know my companion nor held him in reverence. "I think I am in the presence of royalty," I said.

Rodrigo smiled and whispered. "Your suspicions might have been true before the Spanish, but today I am an ordinary man of no consequence."

"I find that hard to believe," I said, but Rodrigo offered no response.

Once we were settled at the only table on the west side of the roof, I enjoyed the view as Rodrigo placed our order.

"I hope you do not mind, Señora. There is a special five-course dinner here that is their specialty. I inquired about the meal tonight and ordered for both of us."

"It is fine. I trust your judgment. Rodrigo, if you do not mind, may I asked you, how old are you?" He waited, as a waiter appeared with a small bowl of fried chapulines, fried grasshoppers seasoned with chili and lime.

"I was ninety-one my last birthday," he said, as he picked up the bowl and offered the edible insects to me. I placed a spoonful on my plate and picked up one and ate. "It is well-known in Oaxaca City that if you eat chapulines, you will always return," he said with a smile. "I feel very guilty right now,"

Rodrigo said. “I ordered these chapulines on purpose. The Zapotec say, anyone who eats chapulines will return to Oaxaca City. It is destiny.” He picked up his Crevasse and toasted me. “Here’s to many dinners like tonight with the amazing Americano,” he said, winking at me. I knew at that moment he did not feel guilty at all, but I did not voice my suspicion. Instead, I tried to keep him focused on his story.

“You were telling me about yourself. I asked you about your age.”

“Ah yes. I am ninety-one, and I think I will live ninety-one more years and become a legend,” he said with a broad smile. “I am very strong and healthy.” I looked at the man who sat across from me. His demeanor reminded me of a man at least forty years younger. A self-described Zapotec Indian, he spoke English with a slight accent.

“What is your secret to a long life?” I asked.

“I drink only on Saturday night. I eat fruit every day. I use only the plants of the people for medicine. I walk miles every day doing my duties. I dance with young women, and I flirt sometimes, too.” I smiled inwardly as he casually flirted with me.

“I think you have had a lot of practice dancing and flirting.”

“True. I have never been married, though. I dedicated myself to the hotel and the people who raised me.”

“Please, tell me about yourself,” I said.

“When I was twelve my mama died,” he began. “My father found another woman almost immediately. There was no time to grieve. She married my father the day after my mother was buried. I was unhappy. So sad. My father’s new wife did not want me around. I had two younger brothers and she liked them, but not me. The hotel owner was a distant relative of my mother. I turned to him and he gave me a home. I grew up here. The hotel has been my home ever since those days. I have my own room, good food, and a little pocket money, but I am richer than the richest man in this valley. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a time when there were still wise men among the people. They have all passed now, but they were my teachers. They taught me about the old ways and I was a good student. I wanted to know everything about our ancestors. I was lucky to live in their presence.”

“Did they tell you about the Star People?” I asked.

“The Star Travelers walked this land—this very place—when I was a boy.

The elders communicated with them."

"Can you tell me about that?"

"Have you ever seen the orbs that appear in the sky?"

"Yes. I have seen them."

"We regard the orbs as our ancestors," he said. "They appear in the night skies as luminous white spheres. Sometimes they are blue or light purple, but always luminous. If you watch the skies at night and you see the orbs, you know it is your ancestor trying to reach out to you."

"What is the difference between the orbs and UFOs?" I asked.

"There is no difference. Sometimes the orbs become flying craft. Sometimes they take human form. It depends on their mission."

"What kind of mission?"

"At one time, they came to us as helpers and teachers. They possessed all the knowledge of the great mystery. Now they come only as observers or to collect medicinal plants. Many of the plants that we use as medicine were planted by the Star Travelers to help us. They grow better here than on their home planet."

"Have you ever communicated with the Star Travelers?"

"Only as a young man when the old men were living. The old men were their friends. They would come down from the skies during the ceremonies. But they have not communicated for a very long time. I think they are very disappointed in the road we walk." He paused as the waitress served a black bean soup seasoned with aniseed. "There is a place in the mountains, a cave, where some say they still come. They rest there and walk the mountains like the old days. I have never seen them, but then I do not go to the mountains anymore. Not since the old ones went away."

"Do you believe the Zapotec came from the stars?" I asked.

"No, Señora. We came from the caves. We are the rock people." He paused as the waiter served a chicken mole. "This restaurant makes the best mole in Oaxaca," Rodrigo said. "There are so many moles in the Chiapas, but the black mole is the best.

"What are the ingredients?" I asked.

"There are about thirty ingredients. I am not sure I know all of them. I know they use several types of chili peppers, chocolate, cinnamon, tomatillos, tomatoes, cloves, and nuts."

“It is delicious.”

“I made a good choice then.”

“Yes. A very good choice.” We ate in silence for a few moments and then Rodrigo continued.

“The Star Travelers came from the sky. We were mutual friends in the cosmos. They helped us and we helped them. The wise men say that in the old days, some of them married our women and took them away to the stars, but the women chose to go with them. They were not taken against their will. The Star People never stayed on Earth. They visited. We called them ancestors because they are older than us. They were not our relatives. They were the ancestors. Their civilization was older. They had more knowledge. Therefore we respected them for that knowledge.”

“Let me clarify. The ancestors are not your relatives, correct?”

“Correct. We called them our ancestors because they were an older civilization. After all, we are all related. Everything in the universe is related —even the plants, the trees, the water, the stars, the people of Earth, the people of the stars.”

“Are there stories about the women who married the Star Men? Did they ever return to Earth or bring their children?”

“I only have heard of Star Men who took Maya women for wives. But they never returned.”

“Do you believe the Star Men helped build the ancient cities like Monte Alban?”

He shook his head. “The Star Men who came to the Zapotec were not builders. They were scientists who roamed the universe looking for plants and medicines to help the civilizations of the world. No, Señora. The Zaptoec and Mixtec built their own great cities. Just look at the diversity of languages and cities. They are all unique. It would take dozens of different Star Groups to have built this [sic] cities. That did not happen.”

“When was the last time you saw the orbs?” I asked.

The waiter appeared with hot chocolate and ice cream flavored with rose petals, interrupting his reply. When he was gone, Rodrigo continued. “They come almost every night. You only have to look. To most, they are invisible because they do not have that inner eye or a heart that is open. I think you will see them if you look. You have the right kind of heart.”

That night, we lingered over two cups of hot chocolate and talked about our lives. We walked slowly back to the hotel. He held my hand and guided me carefully over the uneven cobblestone street. Occasionally we stopped and Rodrigo scanned the sky. I knew he was looking for the orbs, but they never came. The next morning, I woke to a knock on my door. One of the young hotel workers handed me a vase of roses as large as a funeral spray and the largest box of chocolates I have ever seen. "From Rodrigo," he said. I read the attached card. "Si tan solo fuera forty años más joven. Ahora debo esperar hasta mi próxima vida." I smiled at the message. Translated it read: "If only I was forty years younger. Now I must wait for the next life." There was no question: Rodrigo was still flirting.

When I inquired about Rodrigo as I checked out at noon, the hotel manager said that he had gone to one of the villages to visit his brother who was very ill. He was taking medicine to him. "He asked me to apologize for his absence, but hopes that the señora will return soon and he will count the days until you return." I smiled as I walked out of the hotel with my roses and chocolates and joined Benito at the waiting van.

Two years later, I returned to Oaxaca City. After registering, I inquired about Rodrigo and learned that he was still working at the hotel. I spent two weeks at the hotel as Rodrigo's guest. Every evening he arrived promptly at 7 p.m. to accompany me to dinner. On the last day of my trip, I learned that he was not the gardener, but the owner of the hotel. Six months after my last visit, I received word that Rodrigo had passed in his sleep. He had made it to his 94th birthday, a few years short of the life he planned. He left the hotel to his two most faithful employees with the stipulation that I receive free, all-inclusive access to the hotel for the rest of my life. At his funeral, the new owner pulled me aside and said, "You made a big impression on him, Señora. He told me that he would see you again in another life." I have never returned to the hotel, nor to Oaxaca City. Without Rodrigo, it would not be the same.

I think of Rodrigo every time I look at the night sky. He told me that he never worried about dying: "When I pass, the ancestors will come for me and I will sit with the wise men once again. I want no one to grieve for me. I will be with my family where I belong."

Chapter 27
The Place of the Gods

Teotitlán del Valle, a small village located 31 kilometers from Oaxaca City in the foothills of the Sierra Juarez Mountains, was founded by the Zapotecs around 465 BCE. It was originally named Xaquija, which meant "Celestial Constellation" in the Zapotec language, but in the Náhuatl language, Teotitlán del Valle was known as the "Place of the Gods." Though Stephens and Catherwood never ventured into this part of Mexico, a Spanish friar named Juan de Cordoya recorded a legend in The Catholic Encyclopedia that reportedly occurred in 34 CE in Teotitlán del Valle. According to the legend, a huge bright light came out of the northern sky. It glowed for four days in the sky and then lowered itself to a rock in the center of the village. From the light, there came a great, powerful being who stood on top of the rock and glowed like the sun. He stood there for the whole village to see. He glowed both day and night. He lit up the whole village like day. When he spoke, his voice was like thunder booming across the valley.

In this chapter you will meet contemporary Zapotecs who offer their own version of the story and their encounters with visitors from the sky.

One morning after breakfast Benito and I drove to the Zapotec village of Teotitlán del Valle, a place populated by famous Zapotec weavers. The village, about fifteen miles from the city of Oaxaca, is home to approximately 150 families. The majority were engaged in the rug-making business. Weaving had become the main occupation of the villagers since about 1535, when Dominican Bishop Juan Lopez Dezarate arrived in the village and introduced borregos, a type of sheep that produced wool. The first loom, shipped from Spain, arrived shortly thereafter and jump-started a cottage industry producing serapes, blankets, and rugs. Today the village is home to some of the most famous rug-makers in North America.

As we entered the village sleeping dogs woke from their middle-of-the-road naps and ambled toward the side of the road, waiting with reproachful eyes until we passed. We drove directly through the town surveying the many

shops on each side of the road that boasted vibrant displays of weavings in many sizes, colors, and designs.

Stephens and Catherwood never visited this village; their focus was strictly on finding Palenque once they entered Mexico. I, on the other hand, had come to the village to follow up on the ancient legend of the Sky God who arrived in the village on a beam of light from the sky, and to locate a weaver who might create two rugs from my own design.

I visited several weavers, many well-known in the United States. At my last stop I met a young weaver named David, who admitted he was not famous and explained that he did not have the money to attend major art shows. He was an independent artist, depending on tourists not associated with bus tours. He showed me around his small display room. As I examined his work, I knew I had found the weaver to create my rugs. I showed him my design, and after carefully selecting the yarns, I went to his small office to complete the transaction. As he wrote out the dimensions and information about the rug, I asked him about the ancient legend of the Sky God of Teotitlán del Valle.

"Is there anything you can tell me about the legend?" I asked.

He shook his head as he handed me a receipt for the rug. "Maybe it is only a legend, Señora, or maybe it is true. I always watched for Sky Gods when I was a boy. My grandfather told many stories about the men who came from the sky. There were many times that we saw lights in the sky that hung over the village."

"Have you ever seen a UFO?" I asked. He slowly shook his head from side to side.

"Not me, but I have a friend who is visiting his grandmother. He is from San Cristóbal. He has seen them many times. He tells me they are tall men, white skin with white hair and white suits like your astronauts wear."

"Do you think your friend would tell me about his experience?" I asked.

"Sí. If you wait a few more minutes he should come by. We have an appointment to play basketball. I love basketball. He is a very good player. He gives me a good workout," he said, "and keeps me in shape." As he elaborated on his love of basketball and his skills as a player, my eyes were drawn to a photo on the wall behind his desk. He was dressed in a yellow basketball jersey, posing with a basketball on the tip of his fingers. The irony was that David, the rug-maker, stood about five feet tall.

Within the next half hour his friend, who introduced himself as Victor,

appeared on a rickety, rusted bicycle intended for a girl. After introductions, Victor told me about an encounter that he had experienced a year earlier.

"I was gathering wood for my grandmother. I was maybe seven kilometers (4.3 miles) from the city. I got a late start and the sun was going down. I knew I had to get home. It is dangerous on the highway at night. I could be hit by a car. I could be beaten and robbed. As I was tying my bundle of wood, I worried that I might not be able to balance myself on the bicycle with the wood on my back. The pack was large and heavy, and my bicycle was not the best. As I lifted the wood to my back, the ground around me suddenly became like daylight. When I looked up, I saw this strange, blinding light shining down upon me." At that point, Victor began to pace.

"Are you sure you want to continue?" I asked.

"Sí. I was just thinking about how mistaken I was about what happened. At first, I thought God had come to take me to heaven. I asked to be forgiven for my sins, and then I waited. The light did not move. It stayed there for what seemed like minutes. I got up and walked toward my bicycle, but suddenly two men appeared out of the darkness. They blocked my way. The next thing I know, I am in front of my grandmother's house and I did not know how I got there. The wood is on my back and my bicycle is parked by the door."

"What do you mean that you didn't know how you got there?"

"I did not remember riding there. When I told my grandmother what had happened, she said that I had been cursed. She said a witch had put a spell on me. She put me to bed immediately and made a remedy that she said would break the spell. I did not tell her that the witches were strange men. I drank the remedy and fell asleep immediately."

"How did you find out what happened to you?" I asked.

"In the middle of the night I woke up. At first, I thought it was a nightmare but then I realized I was awake. I was extremely thirsty. I got up to get some water. That's when I remembered being forced to drink a thick liquid by the two strangers who walked out of the light. I suddenly recalled being in a strange place. Nothing was familiar to me. I remember seeing others, but no one I recognized. I did not know the place or the strangers who took me. They put me in a room with light that came from the walls. But there were no light bulbs. I felt dizzy. There was a strange smell. There was a fog in the room. I could not see my hands in front of me. My skin was cold but I was sweating. My clothes were damp. I was led to a bed—a hard bed. I remember nothing

else." He paused for a moment, allowing me to complete my notes, and then began again.

"The next day, I was headed back up the road looking for wood for my grandmother. Jorge, who lives in my grandmother's village, said he saw the men from the sky take me the night before. He said I rode on a river of light into this machine and he thought he would never see me again. He was surprised that I was still alive. Slowly the memories returned, but like my grandmother said, they cast a spell on me. I still do not know why they took me."

"How many men did you see?" I asked.

"There were two. Tall men. But I also remember smaller men. Men smaller than me," he said as he lifted his arm and measured the size slightly above his waist, making them smaller than three feet.

"Can you describe them?" I asked.

"The strangers who took me were twice as tall as me. Jorge said they were white with thin, white hair. I never saw their faces, but Jorge said they looked like ghosts in their white suits. I do not remember those things. Only that they were tall and they would not let me pass."

"Can you remember anything else?" I asked.

"Nada. Nothing."

"What about the spacecraft? Do you remember anything about the inside of the spacecraft?"

"I remember being very cold. I cannot remember any details about the craft. I saw other people. People who were not from Mexico. I saw two blonde women. I like blonde women. So I did not forget them."

"Do you think I could meet Jorge?" I asked.

"I don't know where he lives. After his grandmother died, he never came back to the village. One of his cousins said he moved to San Cristóbal. Another one told me he got married to a woman who lived in Cancun. She was from Germany and had lots of money. Jorge always had a way with women. They all loved him."

"One more question. You said your grandmother made a drink for you to break the curse of the witches. Do you know what she put into the drink?" I asked.

"No. It is her secret."

“Do you think she would share the recipe?” I asked.

“No. No. It would be offensive to ask. I could not allow you to do that.”

“I’m sorry. I meant no offense,” I replied.

“It is okay, Señora. She is a good medicine woman. She protects the people from witches and curses.”

“I understand,” I replied.

“Why do you think these space men would kidnap me, Señora?”

“I really don’t know,” I replied.

After saying goodbye, I left Teotitlán. I accomplished more than I set out to do. I had ordered two custom rugs of my own design and found the rock of the Sky God, which still stands in the village. But more than that, I met a Zapotec whose grandmother could break a spell of alien abductors. Although I was unable to get the recipe, at least I know that such a potion exists and apparently works.

Chapter 28
He Came on a Beam of Light

The Zapotec say that their people emerged from the caves in the earth. They believed their ancestors were rocks, trees, or jaguars that were turned into people. Reportedly the elite that governed them descended from supernatural beings who lived among the clouds, and upon death they would return to the clouds and assume their status as supernatural beings. The Zapotec call themselves the Be'ena' Za'a, which translates to mean "Cloud People."

Like Stephens and Catherwood, I often followed rumors and stories of events and places that were not well-known. In doing so, my adventures took me to Oaxaca City, where I was able to explore several Zapotec archaeological sites and interview a number of indigenous people.

While visiting Monte Alban, the largest and most famous Zapotec site, I met a television crew of university students who were filming a documentary on slash-and-burn agriculture in Mexico. The trio approached me and asked my opinion, as a tourist, about the practice. At that point, Benito intervened and explained to them that I was a university professor, which added to their enthusiasm that I appear in their documentary. I declined to appear in their film, but off-camera I told them about my own research. Though both amused and interested in my undertaking, they suggested that my own trip might be a more interesting documentary. As we discussed both our projects over bottles of Coca-Cola, they told me about various legends of Sky Gods and UFO encounters or near-encounters in the state. One particular story, about the God of Ray at Lambityeco, piqued my interest.

By the late afternoon, Benito and I found the ancient city of Lambityeco and hired a local guide who was willing to take me on a tour of the ancient site and to share his insight about the God of Ray.

Lambityeco is located just off Highway 190 en route to Mitla, another Zapotec site. If I had not been looking specifically for the place, I would have missed it. Unlike other ancient cities, this site is located directly beside a two-lane road. There was no parking lot, only a wide spot in the road for cars to

pull off. At the kiosk, I stopped to pay admission and spoke with a guide. He introduced himself as Heliodoro, but preferred to be called Helio. For 50 pesos, he offered to walk with me around the site. I asked him about the legend and he told me that a Sky Lord named Cocijo came to the village on a beam of light and built the ancient temples. He took an earth woman as a wife and she bore him a son. When his son was old enough to assume the leadership of the city, the Sky Lord left Earth on a beam of light.

Although only a small part of the site had been uncovered, many extraordinary sculptures have been revealed including two large stucco masks of Cocijo. For those who believe that extraterrestrials played a major role in the building of the ancient temples across Mexico, the mask of Cocijo adds fuel to that assumption. The image wore a mask that covered almost all the face and the eyes were framed with a type of goggle. A thick plate in the nose was connected to the lower part of the goggles and the mouth mask. A plumed headdress completed the head gear.

As we walked around the site, Helio told me that Lambityeco was once a major trading center and produced the salt for the region. He pointed out the salt pits as we moved along. "When you think about the story of the god who came on a beam of light, has anyone ever suggested to you that the god who founded this city may have been an alien from another planet?" I asked.

"Every day," Helio replied. "Not too many people visit this site, but those who do, come looking for answers, Señora. They want to see the city because of the legend behind it. If it were not for the legend, they would drive on by. Most people do. It is hard to earn a living as a guide at this place. I was about to go home before you showed up."

"I am glad you didn't leave."

"I am happy, too," he said. I watched this agile, fit, forty-four-year-old man as he climbed the site with ease. Occasionally he would stop and offer his arm to steady me as we walked the site. He did not wear the uniform of an official guide. Instead he dressed like many of the villagers I met: men with white shirts and black broadcloth pants. He was taller than me by about four inches (making him an inch shy of six feet) and his dark skin complemented his permanent smile, which revealed perfect white teeth. A small mustache covered his upper lip, making him appear devilish. I couldn't help but think that with a mask and cape, he would have made a perfect Zorro.

"What do you think of the legend of the God of Ray?" I asked.

"If you are asking me if it is true, then I would say to you I believe the legend is true. I do not believe that Cocijo was a normal man. I believe he came from the stars, as do most of the people who live here."

"When you think about the gods from the stars, have you seen a UFO in this area?" I asked.

"Many times they come here. Sometimes they stand over the site as if in reverence. There is a connection between this place and the stars. Cocijo is that bridge and I think they come to honor him."

"Have you ever seen any of the men from the stars?" I asked.

"No, but I believe they are onboard the spaceship. Those spaceships cannot fly by themselves. Someone has to be doing it, and they are smarter than anyone on Earth. The villagers say they are the gods revisiting, but I do not think so. I think they are men, just smarter than us."

"Can you describe their activities when they come?" I asked.

"They hover above the Palacio de los Caciques [Palace of the Political Leaders] and Palacio de los Sacerdotes [Palace of the Priests]. They come here to pay respect for their dead. It would be like us going to a soldier's memorial or a presidential tomb."

"Can you describe the craft?" I asked.

"They are like the ones of the movies. Round, silver disks. They make no sound. Very strange machines. Bright, bright lights. When they decide to leave, they are so fast, you wonder if you have actually seen anything."

"Has anyone in the area ever interacted with the men from space?" I asked.

"There are stories. Many years ago when I was a boy, maybe nine or ten years, the men say that one of the space craft landed, and two men walked out of the craft and stood before the mask of Cocijo. It was a long time ago. Maybe thirty-five years. I remember that night. The night became day. My mother was frightened, and she cautioned my brothers and me to stay inside. I never saw the spacecraft, but the old men of the village saw it and saw the men."

"What did they say about the event?"

"They said that the men stood before the mask and appeared very sad. They spoke not a word. When they left, they looked at the old men, and communicated with them that they meant no harm."

"But you said they spoke not a word."

"Not as we speak. They entered the minds of the old men. The old men said

they did not make a sound, but they knew their intentions were peaceful. The old men called them ancestors."

"What do you think they meant by that?"

"It means we are all a part of the universe. All things of the universe including all living beings, whether they are people or animals or plants or trees or rocks—we are all interconnected. It does not matter if we come from the stars or the Earth."

As we left Lambityeco and Helio, I could not help but think of his definition of the ancestors. To many, the word ancestors implies a direct kinship, but to the Zapotec and many indigenous people, including American Indians, the ancestors implies an interconnectedness, a belief that we are all related.

The Lakota Sioux have an expression for this: Mitakuye Oyasin, meaning "all are related" or "all are relatives." It is used in traditional Lakota Sioux prayer and in songs. It reflects the inherent belief endemic to the indigenous world view that everything on Earth is connected, including all life forms: people, animals, plants and trees, birds, and even the rocks, rivers, mountains, and valleys. According to the Zapotec, this relationship expands to include the People from the Stars.

Chapter 29
No One Believes the Truth

One of the reasons that the state of Oaxaca has retained such an extraordinary diversity of Indian groups is the state's very rugged terrain, which has isolated numerous indigenous groups, cutting them off from mainstream Mexican society. This diversity of cultures helps to make Oaxaca one of Mexico's most interesting states. The cultures find expression today not only in language (sixteen in all) but also in modes of dress, handicrafts, music, and dance. The largest indigenous linguistic group were the 350,000 Zapotec; the smallest, Popolco, with only 61 fluent speakers. Unlike many of the other groups, almost 90 percent of Zapotec speakers also speak Spanish, which considerably enhances their education and employment opportunities.

On my second trip to Oaxaca City, I stayed in the same boutique hotel that was a converted convent. Located near the plaza and the center of town, it served as my base for two weeks. Every day, Benito and I walked to the plaza, drank our morning coffee, and ate egg sandwiches provided by the hotel restaurant. As we sat there watching the people as they passed, I wrote in my notebook while Benito amused himself with conversation with the local men in the Zocalo. On the last day of my stay in Oaxaca City, Benito introduced me to an elderly Zapotec named Carlos. He was the caretaker at a nearby church and, like the two of us, enjoyed his morning coffee in the plaza. When Benito told him why I was traveling in Mexico, he became very interested and quizzed Benito about the stories I collected. I did not know at the time that Carlos had an amazing story to tell.

In this chapter you will read his story.

"The first UFO sighting in Oaxaca occurred in 1874," Carlos began. "I remember the date because my mother was born on the night of the sighting. My grandmother always said that she became so frightened by the UFO that she gave birth." I listened carefully to the elder who spoke about the 19th-century UFO sighting that was apparently well-known in the region. His salt and pepper hair curled over the collar of his open shirt. His t-shirt featured the

image of Subcomandante Marcos, the leader of the rebel group, the Zapatista Army of Liberation, that one time controlled Oaxaca City. Frayed cuffed jeans fell over his sandals.

"Did they tell you anything about the UFO?" I asked.

"Not that I remember. Only that they saw it in the sky for several minutes. Later I learned that it was shaped like a horn. No one has ever seen a UFO like that before or after. It was one of a kind."

"That's very interesting. I did not know that UFO events dated back to the 1800s in Oaxaca."

"There are many sightings in Oaxaca, but few are reported. The people do not report them. Sometimes the tourists or maybe the foreigners who live here, but the Indios do not."

"When you speak of the Indios, are you referring to the Zapotec?" I asked.

"I am Zapotec. Most of the people in Oaxaca are Zapotec, but there are other Indios who live in this area. We are just the most."

"I understand from Benito that you had an encounter with a UFO. Could you tell me your story?"

"I haven't told this story in a very long time. When I told my father the story many years ago, he told me it was best not to tell people the story since no one would believe it even if it was the truth. I accepted his advice and never told the story until now." He paused for a moment and watched two young women, dressed in short shorts and halters, and speaking German, amble across the plaza in front of us. He spoke in his native dialect to Benito, who laughed and nodded. I never asked for a translation. "So if you choose not to believe my story, I will understand."

"Please. I would love to hear your story."

"It happened back in the '80s. I was thirty-five at the time. My cousin, Gozio, had moved to Palenque. He had a job working in a hotel there, and he told me if I came to Palenque, he could get me a job. So one evening, when I had saved enough money, I bought a bus ticket and boarded the night bus to Palenque." He paused and took a sip of his coffee and spoke to Benito in his native language again when the two German girls paraded in front of us again. Benito laughed, and I waited for Carlos to continue his story.

"Did you see the UFO while traveling between San Cristóbal and Palenque?" I asked.

"Sí," Carlos replied. "We were about an hour into the trip. After you pass Oscingo, almost immediately the road becomes switchbacks and mountains and valleys, until you descend into the jungle of Palenque. I was sitting in the back of the bus, hoping I could put my feet up and sleep. A bright light came up behind us. I thought it was another bus or perhaps a military vehicle."

"Did you turn around and look at it?"

"Not at first. When it got closer I turned around. It had been following us for about an hour. When I looked back, instead of headlights, I saw a big spherical ball of light. It lit up the whole countryside behind us. It was moving slowly along the tops of the mountains. Then, all at once, the ball of light moved ahead of us, hovering over the highway. I could tell that the driver was becoming anxious. The bus was veering into the other lane. Finally, the bus driver found a wide spot and pulled over. Everyone climbed out of the bus. Several people got down on their hands and knees and prayed. I stood there watching the ball of light."

"What did the UFO do?" I asked.

"It moved slowly down the valley."

"Can you describe it?"

"It was huge. Grande. It was so big that it blocked out the whole valley."

"Once it moved on, did the bus driver continue the trip?" I asked.

"Yes. But we could still see the UFO up ahead. Sometimes the road would wind around a mountain, and we wouldn't see it for a while, and then it would appear again. Some people wanted the bus driver to stop and wait until it was gone. Others were excited. They had never seen anything like that, and they were curious."

"Were you curious?" I asked.

"Oh yes. I was very curious. But finally, it disappeared. I returned to the back of the bus and tried to sleep, but it was impossible."

"Did you see the UFO again?" I asked.

"Oh yes, about a half hour later. As we topped a mountain, you could see the valley below and there was the UFO, only this time, there were other UFOs. Little ones that were flying into the big one that was lighting up the valley. Then, after all the little ones disappeared inside the big UFO, it gradually moved upward, and after several minutes it was gone."

"Did you report the incident to the authorities?" I asked.

“No. Like I told you, I told my father, and he suggested that I keep the story to myself. After all, it is unbelievable, but I swear to you on my mother’s grave, it is true.” Carlos paused, looked at his watch and stood. “I am sorry. I must go to work.” He bowed slightly and walked away.

I never saw Carlos again. Later that day, I packed my suitcases and left Oaxaca City, but I have thought of him often. It is true: Many people do not believe stories about UFOs. I, for one, am not one of them. I believe Carlos spoke the truth.

Chapter 30
On My Way to Heaven

After leaving the state of Oaxaca and the Zapotec, I resumed my original intent of following in the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood. My first stop was the classic Maya city Toniná, which was located in the highlands of the state of Chiapas. John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood visited Toniná in 1840.

The word Toniná meant "House of Stone" in the Tzeltal Mayan dialect. Located in the middle of an operating cattle ranch today, the city was cut into the base of the mountain and resembled a mountain fortress. The main temple was a lunar temple, which was rare; the majority of the Maya temples were solar. The locals maintained that if you sit at the top of the highest temple, you can see the four corners of the world or, if you prefer, you can enter the underworld from the same place. Known for its military emphasis, Toniná was often called the "Place of the Celestial Captives."

A number of local stories abound about shapeshifting Sky People and underground alien bases related to Toniná. While not a popular site for ufologists, I set out to discover the mystery around the site as I followed in the footsteps of the two explorers. In this chapter, you will learn about local encounters with UFOs at Toniná.

The Acropolis, the main pyramid, was the core of the site at Toniná. It consisted of a hill that reached a height of almost 300 feet and included seven platforms. The bottom three were dedicated to the underworld, the middle one to the middle world, and the top three were dedicated to the upper world. On the top terraces, there were thirteen temples. As I climbed the Acropolis, I was literally making my way to heaven. According to the ancient Maya belief, this ascent connected the individual climber to heaven.

Sitting at the top, I understood how the subjects of the powerful kings believed this temple led to heaven. Located on the side of a hill, the ceremonial temples reached for the sky. As I sat there pondering the idea of heavenly ascension, I saw a maintenance worker climbing to the top. He had a

bottle of water in his hand and a lunch bag. It was obvious that he was searching for a shaded spot to eat his lunch. Anxious to connect with someone who was familiar to the site, I called out to him.

"Hola," I said as he came near me. He hesitated, but smiled.

"Hola," he replied. "Do you like our beautiful city?"

"Very much," I replied. "How long have you been working at this site?"

"Forty years," he said. "I have been here since I was twelve."

"You speak very good English," I said.

"Sí. I learn from tourists. They are good teachers."

"Please, sit down," I said as I noticed him anxiously looking around for a place to rest and eat his lunch. He sat on the steps below me. He was a small man, only a few inches more than five feet. His course, black hair was perfectly groomed. As I looked closer, I noticed that he appeared to be blind in one eye, and I often saw him moving his head to compensate for the impairment.

"I have heard stories that Toniná is a special site that has connections with the cosmos," I said. "Can you tell me if it's true?" A broad smile crossed his face as he took a bite of the tortilla he had retrieved from his lunch bag, but not before offering me the second one in the bag. He smiled when I declined his generosity, and offered me a bottle of water instead. When I showed him my water bottle, he nodded and finished off the first tortilla before speaking.

"Sí. There are many stories told by the elders. Some say the direct descendants of the Sky People, whose blood remains pure live underground. Some say they serve as ambassadors to the Sky People who live in the heavens. That is the reason why the UFOs come back to Toniná. It is to meet with the ambassadors and to learn about the condition of the Earth and its people."

"Have you ever seen these descendants of the Sky People?" I asked.

"I saw them several times, Señora," he said. "When I I was younger, I was a night security officer. They come out at night. Perhaps to get fresh air. They do not go far. They stay together."

"Are they like people?"

"Oh sí. Just like me," he said. "I could never get close enough to see them clearly. Some elders say that during the day they can change to anything they want to be, and they do that to live among us. We do not even know they are

here. They could be a tourist or a stranger from another town and since they can change at will, we never know they are among us. You could be one," he said.

"Do you believe this is true?"

"I believe what the elders say. The elders say they live among us."

"I understand," I replied.

"The elders say that if you come to Toniná with a pure heart, and you sit quietly and meditate, you will feel the Sky People trying to communicate with you. Unfortunately, those who visit our beautiful city have little time to sit and meditate. They are too busy. They take photos and move on. They want all of their friends to know they climbed a pyramid. But that is not what Toniná is about. Toniná is a connection with the universe and the Sky People. It is sacred and is waiting to be discovered by the outside world."

"Have you ever seen UFOs at this site?" I asked.

"UFOs. Oh sí. Muchas veces. Many times. As I said the people from the sky come back to meet with the ancients who live underground. That is where the knowledge of the Earth is stored. It is protected there in case the people above ground destroy the world; the survivors will not have to start all over again. It happened before. The Earth was destroyed and the survivors had to start over again. This time, when the next world begins, the knowledge will be saved, and the people will not have to begin again."

"Have you ever gone underground?" I asked.

"Oh, no. They say that you only go to the underworld after you die. I will go there someday but I am not in a hurry to make the trip." With the last comment, he stood and laughed. "I must get back to work. Nice talking to you, Señora," he said. He touched the tip of his navy blue baseball hat, and said, "Have a happy day."

As I sat there meditating, willing the Sky People to communicate, a man approached wearing an Indiana Jones-style hat and khaki trousers with a vest covered with pockets. As I sat there in the sweltering heat, sweating from every pore in my body, I wondered how someone could climb a pyramid and still look unruffled and cool. I once had a guide who told me he could always tell Europeans from Americans. "Europeans don't sweat; Americans sweat." He went on to tell me that North and South Americans sweat, and Mexicans sweat, but not Europeans. As the man approached and sat down, I waited for him to speak. His first word, "Bonjour," revealed he was one of those non-

sweating Europeans. “Américain?” he asked in French. I nodded. “May I sit?” I nodded again. He told me he was a visiting archaeologist. We talked about Paris, his home city, and then our conversation turned to the legends surrounding the mystery of this celestial city.

“In the early-morning hours, the mist and clouds frequently engulf the top of the pyramids. It is then that you believe that the temples reach to heavens,” he explained.

“Have you ever seen the star ambassadors described in the local legends?” I asked.

“I can’t say that I have, but I have seen UFOs in the area. I have seen lights that flit around, congregate, and then fly off again. The ball court below is their playground.”

“Have you ever seen spacecraft or do you only see lights?”

“Mostly lights. You see many things when you work at this site. The air is so clear. The stars so bright. You begin, like the ancients, to memorize the sky. Any change is noted. I have never seen a UFO up close, however, but I have definitely seen objects that I could not identify.” He stood and began to descend the stairway. “I have some posters in my tent of this site. If you would like, you may stop by. I will give one to you.” Before leaving Toniná, I stopped by his field site. Although the archaeologist was not there, a site worker gave me a poster.

The poster of Toniná is proudly displayed in my writing studio. Every time I enter, I remember the Frenchman, who did not sweat, and the stories of the star ambassadors who regularly stop by to check on planet Earth. It is not the first time I have heard about visitors from the stars who assume the identity of humans. I am fairly certain it will not be the last.

Chapter 31
The Dog That No Longer Barks

Stephens and Catherwood arrived in Palenque in May 1840. To get there they hacked their way through overgrown jungles and then, with horses and mules, forged the Rio Lagertero into Chiapas. The ancient city of Palenque is about eight miles from the town of the same name. Upon arrival, Stephens and Catherwood set about immediately making plans to visit the site. The trip was long and difficult through a virgin forest that was next to impassable.

Catherwood stayed at the ancient city twenty-eight days and nights. When he became too ill with malaria to work, he was forced to leave the ancient site and move to the Yucatan Peninsula.

On my first day at Palenque, I met a tour guide, Manolo, who agreed to take me throughout the entire park, stopping only briefly to familiarize me with the site. Little did I know at the time that this man would introduce me to his cousin, who had a unique and remarkable story about an encounter with a UFO. In this chapter, you will meet Angel and his remarkable dog, Trueno. Both had an encounter.

Benito and I arrived in Palenque in the late evening. We ate dinner that night at the hotel and recapped our travels. The next morning, after breakfast, Benito left for San Cristóbal. After saying goodbye, I headed for the Palenque archaeological site. At that point, I had not hired a driver, nor a guide, but had decided instead to depend upon locating a guide outside the ancient site. My initial goal was to familiarize myself with the grounds and to spend the next several days exploring the site. As I approached the entrance, a tour guide named Manolo approached me. With his perfect English and unparalleled enthusiasm, I hired him on the spot. As we entered the site, one brazen vendor stopped us with a leather painting of the sarcophagus of Pakal, who reigned some sixty-eight years over the ancient city of Palenque, and asked, “Have you heard of Palenque’s ancient astronaut?” I knew he was referring to von Däniken’s interpretation of Pakal’s sarcophagus. Instead of Pakal sitting astride the tree of life for his journey to the underworld, as the Maya believe, von

Däniken described the tree as a spaceship. When I asked the young man if he had ever seen a UFO, he nodded and replied, "Many times." I told him about my interest in UFOs and the stories I had been collecting during my travels. "I will tell you about my UFO," he said, "but you must wait until tomorrow. I will bring my father to help me sell and then we can talk."

As we left the vendor, Manolo commented that he had a cousin who had experienced a number of UFO encounters on his ranch near Palenque town. He agreed to set up a meeting with his cousin, so we cut our tour of the site to half a day. I returned to the hotel for a late lunch and waited for word from Manolo about a possible meeting.

At 6 p.m. he knocked on my hotel door. We drove approximately twenty miles outside of Palenque town and pulled off the highway. When we arrived at the ranch, Angel, Manolo's cousin, was waiting for us. Following introductions, Angel took us on a tour of his property. "Manolo tells me you collect stories about UFOs." Before I could respond, he continued. "If you want a story, you have come to the right place." Angel owned nearly eighty hectares near the ancient city of Palenque. Occasionally, he stopped and pointed out a view of the monuments of the ancient city, and, at other times, he pointed out specific places of interest where the UFOs visited his property. Following the forty-five-minute walk, we returned to the veranda. Prior to beginning the interview, his daughter brought refreshments and disappeared inside the house once we were served.

"I always get up at 4 a.m. I eat breakfast, go to the barn, saddle my horse, check the fences, and make sure the animals are well. That is my routine. It is always the same."

"Do you check the fences alone?" I asked.

"Yes. My boys get up an hour later. I ride alone with my dog."

"So it is dark when you set out, right?"

"Yes. By the time I set out for the fields, the sun is just peeking over the horizon. This particular morning, as I set out, I saw a large, brilliant ball of light in the east. At first, I thought it was the sun, but then I realized it was moving toward me. It kept coming closer. As it approached, it swooped close to the ground and veered off to the north and made a wide circle and came back and hovered about ten meters above me. Trueno, my dog, began to howl." I looked at the listless animal lying at his feet. Angel stooped over and petted him. "The horses in the barn began to snort and kick the sides of their stall. I

ran into the barn, calling Trueno to come with me, but he didn't move. He sat there like he was stone, but I could see his whole body tremble. He was terrified, and yet, he would not follow me into the barn."

"Did you go to him and try to get his attention?"

"No. I was too afraid. I pulled my horse into the barn and put him in his stall. I called and called Trueno, but he stayed outside."

"How long were you in the barn?" I asked.

"No more than two or three minutes."

"Can you describe the craft?" I asked.

"It was like two plates glued together." He picked up two plates from the table demonstrating the craft he encountered. "There was a rounded bump on the top. It was a dull silver, but it faded in and out. At times it was a bright white ball and then it became a silver disk. It put off strange blue sparks at times. It made no sound, but it made the hairs on my arms stand up."

"After it was gone, what did you do?"

"I ran to the field and I called for Trueno, but he was gone. I think the aliens took him."

"Why do you think the UFO took your dog?" I asked.

"Because I looked for him all day and he was gone. The next morning, the ball of light appeared and so did my dog. They brought him back."

"Did you notice any difference in the dog's behavior?" I asked.

"He was ruined. He was unable to bark. But when the UFO returned he ran to the fields and waited looking at the sky. I am very worried about him. He is a good dog. He doesn't deserve this kind of life."

"Have you taken him to a veterinarian?"

"I took him to the animal doctor. At first, he saw no reason why he did not bark, but when he x-rayed him, he discovered that his voice box had been removed."

"You mean, someone performed surgery and removed his larynx?"

"I think that is what he said. He said it was perfect surgery. At first, I thought he was too scared to bark. Now I know these demons took Trueno's bark. They ruined my dog and he will never be the same. He was a good dog. He protected the cattle. He knew when one was missing, and he would find it and bring it home."

"Have you seen the craft again?"

"It came every morning for several weeks and finally it came no more. I was hoping that once the UFO left, Trueno would quit being so afraid, but so far, he will not leave the house. What kind of people would do this to a dog?" he asked.

"I really don't know. What do you think?"

"I think they are the worst kind of animals. They have no respect for life. They take a man's dog and remove his voice box, probably because his barking irritated them. I wonder what other things he had to endure at their hands."

"What do you plan to do with Trueno?" I asked.

"My daughter is soft-hearted and has always loved him. She will take good care of him. It is hard. He knows he has a job to do, but he is too afraid to do it. If a human lost his voice, he could either rationalize his loss and accept it, or be sent to a hospital. But for a dog, it must be much harder. They cannot think and rationalize. Therefore, it must be very hard for him." He paused for a moment, and then looked at me. "If those aliens would do this to a dog, what do they do to humans?"

As the evening turned to night, Manolo and I said goodbye to Angel, who invited us to return for dinner the next night. Over the next few years, I have continued to visit Angel and his family. Trueno died in 2010 at the age of fourteen. He is buried on the property and remains a reminder of the fateful encounter.

When I am at home in Montana, Trueno often comes to mind. Good ranch dogs are highly valued here. It is rare to see a rancher without a dog. Whereas there have been several accounts of cattle mutilations in the state, I have yet to hear of a UFO abduction of a dog, although I have heard of attempted abductions on rare occasions. After hearing Trueno's story, I wonder if there is a race of aliens who conduct experiments on Earth's animals and we just do not hear about it.

Chapter 32
An Astronaut Named Pakal

In 1776 Fray Ramon de Ordonez y Aguiar began writing A History of the Creation of Heaven and Earth. In the book, the padre attempted to explain the existence of the ancient Maya city Palenque, suggesting that a race of people appeared out of the Atlantic, guided by a distinguished leader named Votan.

Another account reported that Votan traveled from a distant planet called Valum Chivum to Earth and built a tower. Beneath that tower was a place that allowed him to travel back and forth between his planet and Earth.

Although not the first white men to see Palenque, Stephens and Catherwood are credited with establishing the most detailed and accurate survey during their twenty-eight-day stay. They left reluctantly, promising to return. They did not know that beneath the Temple of Inscriptions lay King Pakal. It was not until the summer of 1952 when Alberto Ruz, director of research at Palenque for Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), discovered Lord Pakal's tomb.

In 1968, Erich von Däniken published Chariots of the Gods. In the book, he suggested that Pakal, who reigned sixty-eight years over the ancient city, was an astronaut. Reproducing a drawing of the sarcophagus lid, he compared Pakal's pose to that of Project Mercury astronauts in the 1960s, interpreting drawings underneath him as rockets and offering it as evidence of an extraterrestrial influence on the ancient Maya city.

As I walked the site, I met a vendor who took pleasure in repeating von Däniken's interpretation of Pakal's sarcophagus to unsuspecting tourists. As he approached me. I questioned him about the veracity of his story and if he really believed that Lord Pakal was an astronaut. In this chapter, you will read his response.

On my second day in Palenque, I met Manolo for breakfast at 6 a.m. I contracted him on a day-to-day basis, as I had made no previous arrangements for a driver or a guide. After a hearty breakfast of eggs, potatoes, and bacon,

Manolo offered to show me around Palenque town before making our way to the ancient city. Palenque was a hot, humid, one-purpose town. Its days as a sleepy little village described by Stephens were far behind. A string of restaurants, hotels, and camping spots on and around Avenida Juarez, the main thoroughfare, and along La Canada, a popular tourist destination west of downtown, served a variety of travelers visiting the ruins at Palenque.

After the tour, we arrived at the Palenque ruins a few minutes before the site opened. Unlike Stephens's introduction to the site, visitors were exposed to a chaotic environment. There were vendors of beverages, fruit, and souvenirs. Buses and minivans created a major traffic jam. Parking was limited and many tourists ended up parking a mile away and walking to the entrance. Maya men dressed in white cotton shirts that contrasted with their dark skin waited for the travelers, offering tours in a dozen different languages. Women and children sat with coolers along the sides of the parking lot, calling out "Agua, Fresca, Coca, Squirt." A Lacandon Indian in his traditional dress hawked bow and arrow souvenirs, decorated with the iridescent feathers of the rapidly disappearing green parrot.

It was 8:30 a.m. and the heat was already oppressive. Manolo and I entered the UNESCO World Heritage site, passing through a hundred yards of ancient forest before arriving at a clearing. The city was perched on the first rise of the Tumbala Mountains. The high canopy jungle was as awe-inspiring as the ruins themselves, but there was a tranquility that was even more powerful. The multi-tiered tombs of King Pakal and his mother, the Red Queen, rise steep and white amid all the green. A long palace had at its center a tall tower for astronomical observations. In the distance, I saw a tree-smothered hill, a temple that had yet to be cleared of trees and brush. Backed by mountains and surrounded by thick forest, the limestone buildings gleamed as the first rays of the morning sun fell upon the site. I watched the mist wrap around the pyramids and rise. Howler monkeys screamed, poisonous snakes skirted into the underbrush, and leafcutter ants made wide trails through the dense forest. I saw fire ants throughout the site. Black scorpions sunned themselves on the pyramid; spiders as big as a hand dropped from trees onto unsuspecting visitors.

Although 500 buildings in Palenque have been identified, more than eighty percent of the city remained covered by rainforest. As I wandered the grounds, I often found a place to sit and admire the exquisite architecture, and enjoy the uniqueness and isolation of the place despite the crowds. This site had it all.

Steep pyramids, ruined palaces, temples, and residential areas that still retained some of their original paint peeked out from among the moss. As I sat under a tree and watched the visitors, the same Maya vendor I had met the day before approached me. He showed me a leather painting of Pakal's sarcophagus and explained in English that Pakal was actually an astronaut. "Pakal was able to travel back and forth from the Earth to other planets," he said. "The old ones come here to honor him." He held up the leather painting again and began to explain to me the spaceship where Pakal sat. It was a regurgitation of von Däniken's theory.

"Who are the old ones?" I asked.

He pointed to the sky again. "The Sky Gods. The men from the sky."

"Are you saying that Sky People visit Palenque?"

"Sí."

"Have you seen them?"

"Sí. Two times." He pointed at the sky and made a sweeping motion with his arm, illustrating the movement of the UFO across the sky. "My friend, he saw them land one night. He was a night security guard. But he no longer works as a guard. He scared (sic)."

"Did he tell you why he was afraid?"

"Spirits of the old ones come to Palenque. Most Maya would never spend the night here. But he was Mexican, and he ignored the warnings about the spirits. He saw them. They came from the sky and landed in the plaza. They entered the Pyramid of Inscriptions and disappeared. He ran away and never come back."

"Did he describe them to you?"

"They glowed. They were white. Tall and white. Spirits."

"Did he describe the spacecraft?" He appeared puzzled. "Did he describe the UFO?" I repeated.

"Sí. It was round and looked like a hat. A flat hat. It was silver. It smelled awful. Like hell smells. He tasted metal. It made him sick. His head hurt and he got dizzy."

"Do you think your friend would talk to me?" I asked.

"He moved to Cancun. I don't have an address. But he told me that the Sky Men have magic. They can appear and disappear in front of your eyes. He was worried that their magic was evil. He said they could be sent by the Devil as a

warning."

"A warning?"

"Yes. To tell him he should leave Palenque." The young man stood. "Sorry, Señora. I must get back to my post. The tourists, they come." I watched as a tour group of Polish tourists approached the vendor area.

"Thank you for talking to me," I said. Before leaving Palenque that day, I saw him again. I overheard him talking to tourists about Pakal, the astronaut. There was no question that entrepreneurship was alive and well at Palenque even if it meant exploiting the culture.

As I continued my exploration of the site with Manolo, it was not difficult to wonder why and how this great city was built. The Hopi said that in old days there was a red city to the south inhabited by people with all the great knowledge. Perhaps that great city was Palenque; archaeologists reported that the city was once painted red. On the other hand there are those who say that Palenque was built to hold all the great knowledge of the world and was to be a place of study not inhabited by people. Once completed, however, the builders violated their trust and occupied the city.

The more time I spend at Palenque, the more I believe that this city holds great knowledge, but the contemporary world does not know how to access it. It is a mystical, magical place and arguably the most spiritual of all the ancient Maya cities in Mexico. When Stephens left Palenque, he promised to return but never did. When I left Palenque, I knew I would return again and again. Unlike Stephens and Catherwood, I kept my promise.

Chapter 33
The Secrets of Palenque

People who have been abducted by UFOs are usually called "abductees" or "experiencers." Due to a lack of physical evidence, the majority of scientists and mental health professionals dismiss the phenomenon as fantasy-proneness, false memory syndrome, sleep paralysis, psychopathology, and a variety of environmental factors. Dr. John E. Mack, a respected Harvard University psychiatrist, devoted a substantial amount of time to investigating such cases. He found that, in the most compelling cases, his patients suffered from post-traumatic stress syndrome. As he noted, this would imply that his patients genuinely believed that they remembered their abductions.

In this chapter you will read stories about abduction from villagers who lived near Palenque town.

One of my favorite places to stay in Palenque is the Chan-Kah Resort Village. Located between the town of Palenque and the ruins, it's a grouping of casitas, or small houses, surrounded by a tropical forest. Staying there allowed me to get up early and arrive at the site ahead of the crowds who invaded the ancient city by the busload by 10 a.m.

On my third visit to Palenque, I was unable to locate Manolo, so I hired a guide named Pax. A full-blood Maya, Pax was a small, wiry man, who spoke near-perfect English as he ushered me around the site. His back was slightly hunched and he walked with a definite limp. He told me he had been working at the Palenque ruins for almost forty years and that it was getting more difficult to obtain clients because of his age. As we slowly walked the grounds, I asked him about Pakal, the ancient king, who gained fame as an ancient astronaut. He laughed and asked me if I believed in the ancient astronaut theory. I was surprised at how knowledgeable he was about the theory and the works of Erich von Däniken.

"He was just a white man who came up with a way to make money," he said. "For some reason, the white man always wants answers that suit their beliefs. If von Däniken accepted the fact that the Maya built the cities unaided

by extraterrestrials, then that would mean our civilization was more advanced than the white man. That would never do for a race who believe they are superior. So he provided an answer that was acceptable to the world of the white man. People grasp onto things that make them feel they are superior."

"Do the Maya ever question who built the cities?" I asked.

"We do not have to; we know our ancestors built the cities. We are their direct descendants. We know where we come from and where we are going," he replied, offering no further explanation.

On my last trip to Palenque in 2010, I checked into the Chan-Kah Resort and asked the hotel clerk if he knew the guide at the park named Pax. He denied any knowledge of him, but, approximately two hours later, Pax appeared at my room. We embraced as old friends. We walked to the dining room and ordered soft drinks. I explained to him that I was back in Palenque for two weeks and wanted to spend some time exploring the non-excavated buildings at Palenque. Although retired from guide service, Pax told me he could arrange for me to visit several non-excavated sites. I agreed to give him one day to make the arrangements.

The next day, I met Pax at the ancient site. "Are you still interested in ancient astronauts, Doctora?" he asked as he led me through the dense jungle. I watched as he hacked our way through the jungle forest with a machete. Occasionally he stopped and caught his breath.

"I'm still collecting stories when someone has a story to tell," I said.

"I have some friends who have stories to tell. I talked to them yesterday. They will talk to you. For those who do not speak English, I can translate."

"Thanks, Pax. I would really like to hear the stories. I've heard that there are regular sightings of UFOs at Palenque."

"True. Many come to the Temple of Inscriptions where King Pakal was buried. Mostly balls of light go back and forth as though guarding or protecting the entrance. Mostly you see them about the time the forest turns black after the sun goes down".

Later that evening, I drove to Pax's house. He introduced me to his wife, three daughters, and extended family, made up of a sister, mother-in-law, mother, and several female children ranging in age from three to fourteen; all were members of his household. "I'm surrounded by women," Pax said, as he and his daughters helped me unload the back of the vehicle. I brought with me a case of Coca-Cola, a bag of candy for the children, cigarettes, and several

pizzas from the Pizzaria Palenque. The women quickly set about serving the food and drinks, leaving the cigarettes for Pax. As the food was served, I sat with Pax's sister along the back wall of the house, while the men from the neighborhood, whom he had invited, congregated around a large wooden table set up beneath a huge mahogany tree. After the pizza was eaten and the men were smoking cigarettes, Pax invited me to join the group and hear their stories.

"I have a story to tell," the youngest of the group began. He stood up from the table and picked up another Coca-Cola. He was a handsome man. If I had not known better, I would have thought from his profile that he was Pakal, whose image could be seen throughout the monuments in the ancient city. His countenance was identical to the king of the ancient city.

"I would be honored to hear your story," I said.

"My name is Mario. I had an encounter with four aliens about ten years ago. I was fourteen then, but I still remember it. I was on my way to see my sweetheart, who is now my wife." I saw him look toward the house and I noticed several women milling around the door. He caught his wife's attention and pointed her out to me. She looked at me and smiled.

"Where were you when you saw the aliens?" I asked.

"I was on my way to see Lucinda. She lived about four miles from me in another village. I was walking. It was a black, dark night. Occasionally the moon would come out from the clouds and cast a faint light on the jungle. I was nervous. A jaguar had been seen a few days back. I repeatedly shined my flashlight around the road and the forest to check for danger, but suddenly the light went out. I shook the flashlight, trying to get it to come to life. About the same time a bright light appeared over the forest and moved directly over the road. It stopped in front of me. I didn't know what to do. I wanted to run, but I was paralyzed, unable to move." He lit a cigarette. All eyes around the table were on him.

"Are you telling me the spacecraft landed?" I asked.

"Yes. I saw steps descend from the bottom of a strange, round machine and four men came out of it. As they got closer, their silver suits glistened in the light. I had never seen such dress. One carried some kind of instrument and when he pointed it at me, I felt sick."

"What do you mean, you felt sick?"

"It was as though lightning had struck me. I felt needles all over my body. I

felt I was burning alive. Then the pain stopped and I was sick. Stomach ache. I threw up. I remember that."

"What else do you recall?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. Possibly I passed out. The next thing I remember is waking up inside their craft, but I could not focus my eyes. The light was too bright. There was a cold dampness to the room. I was lying on my stomach on a hard surface and when I tried to move, I realized I was strapped down. My back was in terrible pain. I had never had back pain. Panic set in, but before I had a chance to think of a way to escape, I woke outside my Papa's place. Off in the distance, I saw a bright light against the black sky. One moment it was there. One moment it was gone. I decided I must be dreaming and put it out of my mind until I met Tohil, who told me what happened to him." He put his hand on the shoulder of his friend, who sat beside him.

"Have you had any further encounters?" I asked.

"None. One was enough." I heard the men chuckle in the background. I looked at them. They were not laughing at Mario so much as reacting to the fear of the unknown. I looked at his friend, Tohil, who until then had been silent.

"My friend is shy, Señora. It is difficult for him to tell his story."

"I understand that, Tohil. You do not have to tell me." I said.

"No, Señora. I do want to tell. I just don't speak English as good as Mario. I hope you will understand me," Tohil said. "It happened on the same road, but I was with my friend Lorenzo."

"Were you taken onboard their craft?" I asked.

"Sí. There were four small men who take [sic] us. We fought but we were no match for them. I think they have some way of making you helpless. They took us on their ship and put us in a room with strangers."

"Were the strangers Maya?" I asked.

"Maybe one or two. But some were white with yellow hair. Some were in nightgowns. Some were dressed in—I can't remember the word." He paused and spoke in Spanish to his friend who did not seem to understand what he was trying to say.

"Were they wearing work clothes, formal clothes like evening gowns, school clothes…?" I asked.

"Yes. Fancy clothes."

"And others?"

"Different clothes. It was like they were all taken in the middle of something else. Like going to bed, or working, or out for the evening."

"And from your description, would you say they were all from Mexico?" I asked.

"I don't think so. Too many blondes. Maybe all over the world. None of them saw me. No emotion, no fight. They just sat there. No movement. No life in them. I tried to talk to one man but he did not react. The short ones saw me trying to talk to the others, and they forcibly removed me to a room away from everyone." He paused and looked at Mario. "They forced me to drink some kind of a liquid that tasted of dirt. It was thick and slimy and I almost threw up. After a few minutes they put me inside a machine and turned me upside down. I stayed there for several minutes. I could not move. I felt numb, except I was wide awake. My head felt like it was going to explode. I don't know how long they kept me there, but the next thing I remember, Lorenzo and me were standing alone on the dark road and the craft was disappear [sic]."

"Can you describe the craft?" I asked.

"It was a long cylinder. It had a lot of bright lights but the whole craft seemed to glow from a bright red to an orange. Once it settled to the ground, it was a light orange. But the colors were like some kind of glowing lights. I never figured that out."

"Can you describe the beings that captured you?"

"Not well. They were short and powerful. They never spoke but I understood what they wanted."

"Do you remember any other features of your abductors?"

"Señora, I think they drugged me because I fought so much. So everything was blurry to me."

"Where was your friend Lorenzo while you were enduring their experiments?" I asked.

"I don't know. I have no memory of seeing him until we found ourselves on the road together."

"Is Lorenzo here tonight?" I asked.

"Lorenzo lives in Cancun. I can give you the address of the hotel where he works. Perhaps you can look him up. Maybe he remembers more."

"I had a different experience," Gabriel said. I looked at the middle-aged

man who broke the silence. He was a small man, but the muscles in his arms revealed a man who worked hard all of his life. He came closer and Mario and Tohil slid over, and he sat down in front of me. When he smiled, I saw that he only had one tooth." I worked at the Palenque ruins until my legs wore out. I got arthritis in my knees real bad," he explained. "The park officials like young men who can climb the pyramids and look after the tourists. I could no longer do that." I saw a sadness in his face representative of men who had lost their jobs due to physical conditions.

"I am so sorry," I said. "I would have hired you. I like guides who walk slower and allow me to enjoy the city," I said. I heard the other men mumble in agreement.

"You make an old man feel happy, Señora. I will tell you my story. It happened one night. I was picking up papers, water bottles, cans that were thrown around by the tourists."

"Is this a job required of all the tour guides?"

"Not anymore. In the old days we did everything. Mostly they hire women now. But in the old days, they expected us to keep the place clean."

"What time was it?"

"Late in the evening. Before dark, but all the tourists were gone. I found myself over a mile from the entrance when the sky became dark and a lightning storm came up. Taking cover in one of the structures, I decided to wait out the storm. It lasted much longer than I expected. Darkness came and I was still inside the ruins. As the rain eased, I decided to head home. That's when a circular craft came out of the clouds and settled in the plaza. Three men, covered in light, came out of the craft. They stopped in front of the Temple of Inscriptions and turned themselves into balls of light. I watched as they floated upward to the top of the entrance and then they disappeared." He paused for a moment and lit a cigarette. "I ran across the plaza, keeping to the edges and out of sight. Before leaving the plaza, I looked back, but the craft was still there. As I walked down the hill toward the town, I saw the craft move above the trees and head south, and then in a second it was gone."

"Do you have any idea what they wanted?" I asked.

"None. I was afraid. I wanted to get out of there. I didn't stay to find out."

"I have seen the lights many times," Vincente said. Everyone turned in the direction of an elder who sat at the end of the table. Pax had introduced him to me earlier as one of his closest friends. They could have passed for brothers.

“Anyone who has spent time outside at night has seen the lights. Sometimes they come from a craft; sometimes they just appear. I have seen the Sky People turn into balls of light in front of my eyes. I have also seen them disappear. They have great powers. I always try to stay away from them. They are dangerous.”

“Why do you believe they are dangerous?” I asked.

“Power destroys people. Look at the people of Earth. Those with power are destructive. These Sky Men have power much greater than the Earth men. They must be dangerous.”

“Have you ever seen them do anything destructive?” I asked.

“No. But I still believe they are dangerous.”

“I agree with Vincente,” Xaman, a full-blood Maya who described himself as a university graduate, spoke up. “I think Vincente is right. I think they are checking out the Earth. Maybe they want to take it over. Maybe they are like the Spaniards who invaded our lands. Anyone with power has the potential to destroy those who are perceived as weaker, less intelligent, or unable to defend themselves. If you do not have power, you are doomed in this universe. It is the law of the cosmos. At one time, the Maya had the power. Our ancestors chose not to pass along those powers to their children. Now we are like the others. We are at the mercy of the power people. It has been that way for centuries.” All the men nodded in agreement.

“I agree that they have great power, but I think the danger is that they can take us onboard their craft and make us do whatever they want and the Mexican military cannot protect us,” the elder Vicente said. “I don’t think they are the Sky Gods of our grandfathers. The visitors today are others from the universe. The ones who brought us here looked like us. The ones we have seen are taller than us, shorter than us, and none of them look like us.” The other men nodded in agreement.

“Does anyone else have a story to share with the Doctora?” Pax asked.

“I have a story,” a woman called from the doorway. When I asked Pax to invite the women to tell their stories, three came forth. The men immediately stood and disappeared. The women sat down at the table. They were all related to Pax, either by marriage or bloodlines. Pax stayed behind to translate.

“I cannot tell this story in front of the other men,” Isabella, Pax’s sister, said. “Pax is okay. He is our priest, our father, our confessor, our relative. I do not tell this story to many people, but I like you,” she declared. She walked to

the table and sat across from me. “I was taken onboard a space ship and they took samples of my hair and I think they examined me. I was about fifteen at the time. I could not remember much of what happened to me, but later, I was in front of my house. I had my clothes in my hand. I was naked.”

“Did you notice anything different about your body?” I asked.

“My time of the month had started. I became a woman overnight.”

“Did you have any marks on your body?” I asked.

“None that I remember,” she said. “But I never felt the same after that. I felt that someone was always watching me.”

“I have the same feeling. I had an encounter when I was seventeen,” Elena, Pax’s mother-in-law, said. “I was alone at home. My parents had gone to a parade. It was the Day of the Dead. I was sick and decided to stay home. I was asleep when something woke me. I opened my eyes and saw two strangers standing over me. Before I could scream, I became paralyzed.” She paused and looked at the two other women in the room. “The next thing I remember, I was in a room with other people. Most were strangers, but I saw my cousin, Yax, and his cousin, Eduardo. They were sitting in the corner on a bench. I sat next to them, but they did not recognize me. I think they were under a spell.”

“Did you try to wake them?” I asked.

“I tried. I shook my cousin, and I reached over and pinched Eduardo, but neither of them responded. After that, I remember nothing.”

“Do you remember going into another room or being separated from the group?” I asked.

“Nothing. I have no memory. When my parents came home, I woke. I thought I was dreaming, but when I got up to greet them, I realized I was naked. I looked around and found my clothes in the corner next to my hammock. I quickly dressed but I never told anyone about that night. I don’t think I dreamed it.”

“Do you remember anything about the people who took you?” I asked.

“I don’t remember seeing them,” she said.

“I think they have been making us have their babies for a long time,” Camilla, Pax’s wife, said. I looked at the short, round woman with two missing front teeth. Her salt and pepper hair was wound into a bun at the base of her neck and made her round face appear even rounder. “I have no proof, but once when I was about thirteen, I thought I was pregnant, and yet I had never been

with a boy. I had all the symptoms of pregnancy. I told myself it was like the Blessed Mother Mary. I was impregnated by God. It was at the same time I saw a spaceship. Then several weeks later, I saw another spacecraft. The next day, I did not feel pregnant and my time of the month had started."

"Are you telling me that you believe you have had a half-human, half-alien baby?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, but it felt that way to me. When I realized I was not pregnant, I was very sad. For some reason, I convinced myself that I was pregnant and even if I did not know the father, I was going to keep and protect this baby. Afterward, I felt like part of me was gone. Even today, I think of that baby. I was sure I was pregnant and I still do not know how that happened."

As the other women listened to Camilla, they all demonstrated empathy toward her. Each of them had lost a baby during their child-bearing years and they could relate to the emptiness of her feelings. After listening to them for about a half hour, I asked them if they had any questions for me. Most of them were surprised to see me traveling alone. We talked about my culture and the matriarchal societies and agreed that Maya women once held greater prominence than modern Maya women. "It's the machismo of the Spanish that ruined our men," Elena said. They all agreed. I wondered how Pax could be regarded in such a fashion. He was outnumbered almost fifteen to one.

Every time I returned to Palenque, I visited Pax and his family. While still surrounded by women, he was hopeful that his pregnant daughter would bring him a grandson in the spring. He told me if the child is a boy, he wanted me to give him a name. True to his word, a grandson was born, and I named the boy: Geronimo after the great Apache warrior.

Chapter 34
They Walk Among Us

When Stephens and Catherwood visited Palenque, the Maya refused to spend the night in Palenque with them. They believed the place to be haunted by the ancestors. It was in Palenque that I first heard of the invisible Star People.

In this chapter you will read about this phenomenon from a Lacandon Indian who chose to straddle two cultures to support his family.

There are Lacandon Indians who work at the entrance to the Palenque Archeological Park selling handmade bows and arrows to tourists. They attract attention from the tourists because of their unusual dress: a simple white, homespun-cotton gown that falls between their knees and ankles. The dress is the same for the Lacandon Indian men, women, and children. I had the good fortune to be accompanied by Hernando, who was friends with one of the Lacandon vendors. When I was introduced to Alom, he told me the Star People still walked on their land.

"When I was a boy, my grandfather told me about the Star People. He said if we could go to our place of birth, where our ancestors live, we would see the Maya culture and language is the same there as it was once in our great cities. That is the reason the Maya can communicate freely with the People from the Stars. They speak our language."

"Have you heard about the Star People who come to Earth and take people or animals to their spacecraft and conduct experiments?" I asked.

"Intrusos. They are the—how you say, interlop…?"

"Interlopers?"

"Yes. Interlopers. They are not the Star People who guided us here. These Star People are from other stars. They are not friends. They are intrusos. Invaders."

"What can you tell me about the Star People?" I asked.

"The Star People are invisible to most people on Earth. They do not see them. People have forgotten to look beyond what the eyes can see. At one time

every human had this ability. But they got lazy and lost the power. They are not aware the Star People walk among us. They are invisible to their eyes."

"Are they with us now?" I asked.

"They always come to Palenque. The elders say Palenque was a star base in the ancient days. They come here to cry for the Earth. They knew it when it was untouched."

"Do the Star People participate in your ceremonies?" I asked. "Or maybe I should ask, do they ever give you messages in your ceremonies?"

"We still practice the old ceremonies. In my village, there is a ceremony that is performed for all things visible and all things not visible. Sometimes they appear at our ceremonies."

"How do they show themselves?" I asked.

"Many people have seen the balls of light but not all have seen the humanoid appearance of the invisibles. The trouble with the people today is that they do not see the invisible. To see the invisible, you have to look inside yourself. The modern-day people are ruled by law, not by heart."

"Does this apply to the Maya as well as others?"

"The Maya are the guiltiest. They were the first to receive the gift, but now that they have been influenced by the Ladinos. Many have lost the gift. We are the Hach Winik, the real people. When our children forget that, there will be no one who will be able to see the Star People."

"Are any of your children able to see the Star People?"

"A few. There are children from traditional families who are taught to see, but so many have chosen the modern ways. They are no longer interested." He paused for a moment and looked at the tourist buses leaving Palenque. "If you go into Palenque today, find a place away from the crowds and sit quietly. You will feel the Star People trying to communicate with you."

Before heading north to Merida and the ruins of Uxmal, Stephens tried to buy Palenque. The asking price for the 6,000 acres with a deduction for all the clutter of stone palaces and pyramids was $1,500. There was another obstacle, however, very unlike that he had encountered in Honduras: A foreigner in Mexico could not purchase property unless married to a Mexican. Stephens desperately wanted the ruins and briefly romanced the Bravo sisters, two local beauties who lived in Palenque. In the end he departed, still single.

I didn't try to buy Palenque, but I must admit the site held a spell over me. I

have visited Palenque eight times, each time staying longer than before. I am convinced that Alom was right. You can feel the Star People in Palenque, but you must be open to the possibility. There is a spirituality in the ancient city that is difficult to dismiss, and at night it is not unusual to see the balls of light. As Alom counseled, you have to be able to see the invisible.

Chapter 35
The Space-Traveling Maya

On more than one occasion, I met elders who explained that the temples at each site were the dwelling places of the gods on Earth. The Lacandon Indians, who live in the jungles of the Chiapas, along the Mexican side of the Usumacinta River and its tributaries, believed that the gods once lived in the great pyramids, but a time came when the gods returned to the sky and built dwelling places on other planets.

The Lacandon are the most isolated and culturally conservative of Mexico's indigenous population, and have been the harbingers of the ancient spiritual practices, traditions, and the original stories of the Maya. Today, the Lacandon presence is visible at Bonampak, an ancient Maya city that borders Guatemala.

Stephens and Catherwood never made it to Bonampak, and even today, although some tourists do make it to Bonampak, it is a rather difficult and distant journey.

In this chapter, you will meet a Lacandon elder who added another dimension to the space-traveling Maya: a star map of the solar system.

After meeting the Lacandon father and son at Casa Na Bolom, I decided to spend a day at Bonampak, where reportedly Lacandon Indians played a pivotal role in the maintenance of the ancient site. Hernando told me he knew a Lacandon elder named Canek who knew the old stories about the Maya and if he were at the site, he would encourage Canek to talk to me about the old ways.

We had not been at the site for more than a few minutes when Canek approached us. "I understand you are looking for me, old friend," he said in perfect English, addressing my driver.

"I told the Doctora that I would ask you to tell her about the Maya connection with the Sky People." The elder smiled and sat down between the two of us. He smelled of herbs that I was unable to identify. Dressed in the

traditional gown of his people, he appeared much cooler than those of us dressed in Western clothing. When he noticed that the hot sun was making me uncomfortable, he suggested we moved to a log that was shaded by an ancient structure.

After we were settled, he began: "I do not usually give interviews about the Sky People. But Hernando is my friend, and if he says I should talk with you, it is good for me." He paused and retrieved a cigarette stored in the crevice of his ear. Once he had taken a drag off the cigarette, he began. "We have stories that tell us that the Maya came to this land from the East. In the beginning we were the Sky People. Our people possessed a star map. We knew our way around the solar system."

"Do I understand you correctly? Are you saying that the Sky People and the Maya people are the same?" I asked.

"Yes. We are the same. We also believe that when the time comes and the Earth is cleansed, the Sky People will come for us and take us away," Canek said before stopping and briefly interacting with two children who threw themselves into his arms. They were smaller versions of him. Both were dressed in identical, simple, white cotton gowns, despite the fact that one was male and the other a female. Their long, loose, black hair fell halfway down their back. They looked at me and smiled shyly while listening to the words of the elder. After a few minutes, they ran off across the ancient plaza and joined several other children, all dressed alike.

"They are my son's children. Twins. You will have to forgive their stares. They are fascinated by outsiders."

"They are wonderful. You must be very proud," I said.

"Proud, but worried. It is hard to keep them traditional when they see the ways of the world." The worry on his face showed in his eyes and furrowed brow. I decided to change the subject.

"Can you tell me about your star map?" I asked.

"We had a star map that led us to this place. Our legends tell of the birth of the heavens. Much of our ancient knowledge is being confirmed by astronomers today," he added.

"Can you tell me anything about the star map?"

"It is lost now. I can tell you that it mapped the stars. Planets that were inhabitable were marked. The Sky Gods chose this place for us."

"Why did they choose this place?"

"Why not? It is one of the most beautiful of all planets. The jungles feed us. The soil is rich. We can feed our people."

"Do your young people know these stories?" I asked.

"Yes. We attempt to keep our children away from the modern world. We school them in our traditional ways. Otherwise they would be lost in the ways of the world. For the Maya youth in the cities, they no longer want to be Maya."

"You mentioned that the Sky People will come for you if something happens to the Earth. Could you elaborate on that?"

"The Sky People come to those who believe," he said. "I know the role that the Sky People played in our lives. So they come to me and take me far into space, and they tell me things."

"What kind of things do they tell you?" I asked.

"They tell us to practice our old knowledge and pass our knowledge to those who will listen. They tell us many sad things are about to happen to this Earth. They tell us to be ready with our prayers and the Sky People will remember us and come for us. We need to say our prayers and they will hear."

"Can you tell me specifically any one thing that they tell you?" I asked.

"They say that one day the Maya will be taken by the Sky People to the sky. The Earth will be cleansed."

"Do you believe that these things will happen?" I asked.

"It will happen very soon."

"When you are taken to the stars, will you be returned to Earth, once the cleansing is over?" I asked.

"Some of us will return, but others will go to another star to begin a new world. This is what the Sky People tell us," he said.

"Do the Sky People visit your village today?" I asked.

"Not since I was a boy. The Sky People do not come when strangers walk our land."

"Do you mean the tourists?" I asked.

"The tourists have changed everything. Look at the children. They are very curious about the white man. Soon they will want things of the white man. My son, for example, is one of the drivers who bring the tourists here. He wears

the clothes of the white man. Jeans and expensive boots. Gold jewelry like the white man. We have never worn boots. Sandals or barefoot—that is our way. We need to return to the jungle before the Sky Gods return."

"But clothing does not mean he has forsaken the old ways," I said, trying to reassure him.

"I am not a good example, either. I have been the shaman to the rich, white people." He smiled, revealing his gold teeth, the symbol today and in ancient times of the privileged class. "Perhaps it is my fault. I should never have been a healer to the rich people." I looked at my driver, hoping he would change the subject and somehow comfort him, but he kept his head bowed and stared at his hands.

"Have you ever seen UFOs in your village?" I asked, attempting to change the subject again.

"Many times, but they are not the Sky People. You have to be careful of them. Some are good and some are bad. The bad ones take people and sometimes they never return. I tell my children and grandchildren to avoid them and to always be home at night, but then, they are not always safe at home. The bad ones can take you anyway. We pray to the Sky Gods to protect us. It has been a long time since anyone has been taken by the bad ones, but we always must be alert." He stood and shook my hand. "I must go now, Doctora. I am meeting with a group of people who have asked for a ceremony. I must prepare."

I have often thought of Canek. He was a man who lived in two worlds but was not happy about that role. Although convinced that the day would come when the Sky People would come for the Maya, he was still concerned about the future of his people. I wondered if his predictions of the future were tainted by exposure to the outside world, a world that he feared for his grandchildren. Yet, I have heard similar stories from American Indian elders and wise men. That, in itself, lent credibility to his prophetic statements.

Chapter 36
They Live Under the Sea

On the east coast of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula resides the great and mysterious ancient Maya outpost of Tulum, formally known by the Mayan word Zama, meaning "city of dawn." The ruins, which overlook the Caribbean Sea, was one of the last cities inhabited and built by the Mayas.

The first detailed description of the ruins was published by John L. Stephens and Frederick Catherwood in 1843 in the book Incidents of Travel in Yucatan. The city emphasized the importance of the worship of the Descending God.

Tulum has a history of UFO sightings. Among the locals, there is talk about an underground station for UFOs. This chapter relates one of those stories.

Outside the ancient city of Tulum, a circus-like atmosphere exists. Indigenous dancers, food courts, and guides confront the tourists, who have made Tulum the third most popular Maya site to visit.

Anyone who visits this ancient city is likely to see the age-old Dance of the Voladores (Dance of the Flyers), an ancient Mesoamerican acrobatic dance. The ritual consists of climbing a 100-foot pole from which four of the five participants launch themselves tied with ropes in a descent toward the ground. The fifth remains on top of the pole, dancing and playing a flute and drum.

There are various interpretations for this dance, including the belief that the whirling dancers represent the Sky Gods who flew through the air. One elder told me that the dance represented the Descending God, when he came to Earth.

Upon entering the site, I found an English-speaking guide, Geraldo, who for 300 pesos agreed to accompany me on a tour of the site. As we made our way to el Castillo, the Castle, and the view of the Caribbean Sea, he told me about his family. He said he was the only son in a family of seven male siblings who had a paying job. The remainder of his family farmed the land that had been in his family for as long as anyone could remember. "Those days are in danger,"

he said. “The tourists come and we fall victim to money. Everything is money these days. People want TVs, computers, cell phones. My brother wants a computer. He is only seven. Life has changed for the people, and it will never be the same.”

As we approached the cliff overlooking the blue Caribbean Sea, several jets flew past in formation, much to the surprise of the awestruck tourists. All heads turned upward as we watched the acrobatics of the pilots. “Is there an air show nearby?” I asked.

“The airplanes come from Mexico City. They practice here. This is the team that chases UFOs. They have to be fast and gymnastic.”

“Gymnastic?”

“How you say? They have to be able to make turns, drop, and roll like the UFOs.”

“Oh yes. I understand. Have you ever seen them chase a UFO?”

“Many times.”

“How many UFOs have you seen?”

“Many. Many.”

“Can you tell me about your most recent sighting?”

“Sí.” He guided me to a concrete bench for two in a shaded area overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Below were hundreds of people playing in the sea and sunbathing. “How do you say ‘dark before dark’ in English?” he asked.

“Dusk?” I asked.

“Sí. That is the word in English. It was dusk. I was walking through the park with my friend who is a guard. He was checking to make sure there were no hiding tourists. They like to hide out so they can spend the night on the beach, but it is not allowed.”

“I heard that tourists try to do that. I can understand their reasons. It is so beautiful.”

“Mostly German tourists and Swedish,” he said. “Gringos are more respectful.”

“That’s good to hear,” I said. “So what happened with the UFO?” I asked, trying to keep him on the subject.

“My friend Ignacio and me [sic] were walking toward the exit, when all of a sudden the night turned to daylight. We looked upward and then toward the

sea trying to locate the cause of the light. That's when we saw this huge craft that was shining a blinding orange light over the ocean. It cast this strange glow as far as you could see. The craft was just sitting there."

"Can you describe what you mean by sitting?" I asked.

"It stayed there in one place. Not moving."

"How long did you see it?"

"It stayed there for two or three minutes and then it dived into the sea. We never saw it again."

"Have you seen other examples of UFOs that were similar?" I asked.

"I have seen the fiery, orange balls several times. Every time we see them, we see the fighter jets. We think the military does not understand them or what they are. I told Ignacio that we should go to Mexico City and tell the soldiers what we know, but he says they will not listen."

"What would you tell them?" I asked.

"I would tell them that the UFOs live under the sea. I do not know where they come from—maybe from space. Maybe they have always lived there, but whoever they are, the Mexican military chases them, and to me that makes them important."

"I collect stories about UFOs," I said. "I have other stories of people who have told me about spacecraft that dive into water."

"They must have a station—how you say?"

"A base?" I asked.

"Sí. A base. It makes sense. No one would bother them in the sea. It is too deep. Perhaps they live in a world of water. Or maybe, a world with no water and they find the sea an interesting place to live."

As we left the park, I invited Geraldo to join me for lunch. When he hesitated, I suggested that I would like to include his story in a book I planned to write. He hesitated again, and I realized that he needed the money from his job for his family. When I offered him three $20 bills for his time, he smiled. "Thanks, Señora. You just bought my afternoon, and evening, if you like," he said. We made our way back to the entrance aboard a people mover, which was the bed of a construction truck pulled by a tractor. There, among the hustle and bustle of the tourist scene, we found a table. After ordering cold drinks and tacos, Geraldo began to tell me about an event that happened in his village some eleven years ago.

“I grew up in a small village near here. It was a famous village for its resistance during the Yucatan’s Caste War. I am very proud of my little village. It survived fifty years of Mexican army raids before the war ended.”

“I have read about the Maya uprising and the Caste War.”

“My mother’s grandfather was part of the resistance. My family still lives in the village. They can verify the story I will tell.” He paused, finished his Coca-Cola, and called for another.

“It was a dark night in the village. It had been raining and there were hurricane warnings. People were worried. The wind blew violently and the rains poured down upon us. My family was thinking of leaving and going inland. It would be a difficult trek. We had no cars. Nothing but our feet. As my mother packed some food, a brilliant light flooded our small house. We all ran to the windows, seeking the source of the light. My grandmother yelled for us to get in the corner of the house for safety. I didn’t obey. I ran out into the night and that is when I saw it. Overhead, just at tree-top level, there was a UFO. It was round, and it lit up the whole village. The rain stopped. The wind stopped. The UFO was like an umbrella. It was protecting us. For several hours the UFO stayed over our village. When the wind and rains lessened, it moved on. Some say it protected the village from flooding. Others gave reports of abduction. For me, I saw it, but I cannot explain it. I don’t know if any of the stories were true.”

“Did you see any beings?” I asked.

“None. Just the craft with bright white lights protecting the village from the rains.”

“What did your village elders say about the event?” I asked.

“They said the Sky Gods came back to protect us. They said our village survived because it was a reminder of the injustice visited upon the Maya people by the Mexican government. If it were destroyed, there would be no reminder.”

“Do you believe this is true?” I asked.

“Sí, Señora. I saw the craft and I do believe the UFO protected us. They wanted our village to be a reminder of injustice.”

“Have you ever seen an alien or a Star Traveler?” I asked.

“Only once, and then I am not sure.”

“Could you explain?” Geraldo took a drink from the Coca-Cola bottle and

finished off his taco.

"I'm a simple man, Señora. I grew up in the jungles. I am not one to be afraid of things. I was always taught to be observant. I am a good hunter, but one afternoon, while hunting with my cousin, I came upon a strange creature. I thought at first it was a man, but then I'm not sure what I saw. It walked like a man, but would drop down on all four feet and hands and run through the forest like a cat. I swear to you, when it was on its feet it looked like a man, but when it walked on its hands and feet, it was like an animal. It also changed colors and climbed trees like a monkey. I had never seen such a creature. It was magnifico!"

"How long did you follow it?" I asked.

"To be true, I don't know. I was too excited and perhaps a little frightened, too. I followed it for some time, and then it stopped, stood up, took a human-like form, and looked around as if checking the surroundings. Then, it bent down and pulled a long machine from under the forest trees. The machine was about three meters long and about a half meter wide (ten feet by two feet). I was surprised at how easily the creature moved it, almost like it was a huge toy. I thought it must be some kind of special material and yet it looked like metal, but it couldn't be. Otherwise one person could not handle it so easily."

"What did the creature do with the machine?" I asked.

"It climbed inside. It was some kind of a flying machine, but it did not make any noises like an airplane. I watched it for a few seconds and then suddenly the machine began to spin and spin." He paused and made a circular motion with his finger. "It moved faster and faster, and limbs and leaves from the jungle floor rotated around and around. It slowly moved upward and in a flash, it was gone."

"Where were you when all this was happening?" I asked.

"I was hidden. I came out after it was gone."

"Where do you think the machine went?" I asked.

"I'm sure it was from space. That machine was his spaceship, but I don't think it flew to another planet in that machine. It was too small. There must have been someone waiting in the sky—a bigger ship." He paused and drained the Coca-Cola bottle. "The old ones say that the holy men could turn into animals. I thought that perhaps he could be one of our shaman, but they do not have spaceships. So it could not be them."

"Did you tell your elders about the encounter?" I asked.

"Shortly after I saw the man creature from the sky, I got this job. I think my good luck was brought by the Sky Man. He was magic. You see, many people wanted this job. But I got it. I never told anyone about the creature, otherwise my magic would be lost."

"But you told me," I said.

"Yes. But you are not from my village. An outsider cannot break my magic. And now you are a part of the magic. Don't you see?" I shook my head, waiting for him to explain his logic. "What are the odds that I would meet you today?"

"I really don't know," I said.

"It must be a thousand to one, maybe ten thousand to one," he said. "Of all the people who came to Tulum today, you chose me for your guide. That is magic. And then you are investigating UFOs. That is magic. And finally, I can tell a story that has never been told, to a writer who can share it with the world. You can be my voice and let people know that UFOs are real and space creatures are real. I believe the Sky Man wants us to know that he exists. It is magic, don't you see?"

It was hard not to get caught up in Geraldo's enthusiasm. I have only seen him once since the first time we met. On a return trip in 2010, I visited Tulum and I spotted him standing near the gate. He rushed toward me and we walked the ancient city together as old friends. He still talks about the magic of the Sky Man. Every time I hear The Lovin' Spoonful's song asking if I believe in magic, Geraldo comes to mind. All it takes is the first line and my mind drifts back to that day when a young Maya man who had firsthand knowledge of UFOs and Sky People convinced me that my coming to Tulum was part of the magic planned by the space traveler.

Chapter 37
I Heard They Only Take Humans

John L. Stephens heard reports of Coba in 1841, but it was so distant from any known road or village that he decided the difficulty of getting there was too daunting. I made the trip, which is about 27 miles northwest of Tulum, in less than an hour. Archaeological evidence indicates that Coba was first settled around 100 BCE and abandoned around 1500 CE.

The site is about thirty square miles in size and swathed in jungle. There is a system of approximately forty-five ceremonial roads, known as sacbe in Mayan, radiating out from the main temples. It is believed that at one time 75,000 people lived in Coba. Although it is in a poor state of preservation, it is notable because the site contains the tallest pyramid, Nohoc Mu, on the Yucatan Peninsula.

The city is located near four natural lakes. The name, Coba, translated from the Mayan means "water stirred (or ruffled) by the wind." There were claims that Coba was a hot spot for UFO sightings.

This chapter describes an event witnessed by one of the residents of a nearby village.

I arrived at Coba just as the site was opening. I wanted not only to avoid the crowds, but to arrive in time to see some wildlife. Because of its jungle setting, a variety of wildlife including birds, howler monkeys, and butterflies call Coba home. While my driver paid the entrance fee, I covered my arms and face with bug repellent. Mosquitoes were everywhere. I watched a group of fluorescent blue morpho butterflies fly from flower to flower, and a mother hummingbird feed her baby in a nest on a limb above my head. Air flowers grew on trees and, at one point, my driver, Juan Manuel, pointed out that an especially pungent white flower was used by the Maya to make alcoholic beverages.

"Señora, there is a taxi driver who has a strange story about UFOs," Juan Manuel said. I hired Juan for the day, upon the recommendation of the hotel

owner in Tulum. During the trip, I told him that I was collecting stories about UFOs. “I heard about his encounter with a UFO on my last trip to Coba. I spoke with his father, who operates the t-shirt kiosk over there,” he said, pointing to the makeshift shack that displayed hundreds of t-shirts. “His son drives one of the taxis inside the park. We can look for him at the taxi station. I think you might like to hear his story.” We walked inside the site and approached the transportation stand. Juan indicated that he saw the taxi driver in question. I waited as he approached the young man, who sat perched on a bicycle with a rickshaw-type contraption in front. This “taxi” was used by tourists to take them to the Nohoc Mu pyramid, which was about a mile away.

The young taxi driver, who identified himself as Cacoch, spoke in the local Mayan dialect with a smattering of English and Spanish. I hired a second taxi for Juan to travel with us and serve as a translator. Juan, who described himself as a Yucatec Maya, spoke Spanish, English, and the local Mayan dialect.

“He wants to know how many stories you have collected about UFOs,” Juan said as we pulled away from the taxi stand.

“Tell him I have collected hundreds and that I only collect stories from indigena.” Juan Manuel translated.

“I tell you a story like no other. You can use it if you ever want to write it,” Cacoch said.

“I explained to him that you are a writer, Señora. He is proud you are interested in his story.”

“Did it happen here at the Coba site?”

“It happened one evening a few months ago. It was almost dark. I was going home for the night. Just as I left the entrance and started my walk home—I took the road by the lake—I saw a UFO come out of the clouds. It stopped over the lake and just stayed there.” He stopped his bicycle and Juan translated.

“Can you describe the UFO?”

“Sí. It was round and had a hump and another hump on the top. It had many lights running underneath. It made no noise.” From his description, Juan suggested that there were two domes, one larger than the other on the top of the craft.

“How big was it?” I asked.

"It was big. I had never seen anything so big."

"How long did it hover over the lake?"

"Three, maybe five minutes. But while it was there, a beam came out. It moved over the lake like it was searching. I hid in the reeds by the bank. I was afraid they would see me. Suddenly the beam fell on an unsuspecting crocodile. It was resting near the bank. The beam lifted the crocodile upward and took it on board the UFO."

"Took it?" I asked. "I don't understand."

"They lifted the crocodile up to their ship. It struggled but it did no good. They took it. I heard they sometimes took humans. I did not know they took crocodiles."

"You are the first person to tell me about a UFO taking a crocodile," I said.

"But that is not the end of the story. Two days later, I was walking home again and the same thing happened at the same place. This time I was with my friend, Orlando, and he saw it, too. But before they took another, they dumped the body of the dead crocodile into the lake."

"Are you telling me that the UFO dumped a dead crocodile into the lake?"

"They dumped it and took another. They must have killed the crocodile, and they no longer needed it. They dumped the dead one and took a live one. Have you ever heard of this?" he asked.

"Not a crocodile, but I have heard of them taking other animals." I waited for Juan to translate. I saw Cacoch nod. "When they are found, the animals are dead and organs have been removed. Was there any evidence that they experimented on the crocodile?" I asked.

"I don't know if they experiment," he said. "I know the body was lifeless. I did not go near it. But it was dead. It was belly-up in the water. I did not want to touch it." He stopped the bicycle again. "If they take humans, do they kill them, too? There are people who come up missing sometimes. Do you think that the UFOs take them, kill them, and dump their bodies into the lake?"

"If they do, I have heard no such stories," I replied.

"I tell my wife and children to stay inside at night. I don't think the lake is safe at night." I waited for him to speak again, but he sat there looking up at Nohoc Mu. We had arrived at our destination.

"Have you had any other experiences or encounters with UFOs?" I asked.

"Many nights, UFOs fly over Coba. They seem to like the lake. My friend

Muwan says that they sometimes go inside the lake and stay there. He thinks they live in the lake." He paused a moment and smiled. "It's hard to believe, but then, who would think that they would steal a crocodile?"

Though I have heard no other accounts of crocodile mutilation, there is no question that something is going on. Since I began collecting stories from indigenous people about their encounters, I have heard stories of a buffalo mutilation, a dog abduction, and cow and horse mutilations. I was not surprised to learn that an alien race was also interested in crocodiles.

Chapter 38
They Come for Something

For centuries, Merida was the stronghold of Spanish colonialism in the land of the Maya. Dubbed "the White City" because of its white houses and the white clothes worn by its residents, Merida was once the Maya city T'Ho. Renamed by the conquistadors after Merida, Spain, the city takes pride in its multi-cultural population.

Stephens and Catherwood stayed in Merida for several days on both of their trips, but the explorers moved on after a few days of rest because the city was so far removed from the ancient sites.

In this chapter you will meet two elders from Merida who recalled several UFO sightings over their lifetime. Both believed the alien visitors have a hidden agenda.

I was sitting with my guide/interpreter, Julio, and my driver, Arturo, in the city plaza in Merida. The Zocalo was a historic center filled with stalls of food, jewelry, balloon salesmen, Panama hats, and t-shirts. My companions chatted with two elderly men in white pants and shirts, white hats, and sisal sandals. They talked in rapid-fire Spanish and Yucatec Mayan about women, debating which village had the most beautiful women, but I couldn't make out much more than that. I was taking notes about the surroundings when the duo asked my guide what I was writing. He told them I was writing a book about them. They laughed uproariously. When he told them I was writing about UFOs, they laughed and another torrent of Spanish and Mayan was lost in translation.

"Julio, please ask them if they have ever seen a UFO." I waited for him to translate.

"Do you know the town of Piste?" asked the elder who identified himself as Aldo.

"Yes. I know the town."

"Have you heard of the Cenote Ik Kil?" Francisco asked.

"Yes. I know it very well."

"We grew up in Piste. Francisco and I were born two days apart. We have always been like brothers," Aldo began. "Back when we were boys, Chichén Itzá was our playground. We swam in Ik Kil before tourists even knew about the place."

"There were no tourists, just rich people who came by once in a while," Francisco interjected.

"And archaeologists," said Aldo.

"In those days, you could drive up to the pyramid, park in front, and climb it. I loved those days." Aldo stopped and looked at Francisco. They both seemed lost somewhere in nostalgia. "It was a good place then. There were few visitors in those days; today they are everywhere. They say it is progress and that it brings in money to the people, and I suppose it does, but it exploits our heritage and the real people."

"When you use the term real people, do you mean the Maya people?" I asked.

"Sí," they both answered in unison. "But only the Maya who lived as the old ones lived," Aldo clarified.

"Can you tell me about the UFO?"

"Sorry. Sometimes we get off the subject." They both laughed and spoke rapidly again to my companions in a mixture of Spanish and Yucatec Mayan. I did not understand them.

"I think they come for something," Aldo said.

"They come for water," Francisco said. "The first time we saw them it was at the Cenote Ik Kil. We saw this large craft. It covered most of the sky. It just stood there as though suspended from rope in the sky. We were boys—no more than eight or nine. We were so frightened."

"It was amazing. We had no idea what it was," Aldo said.

"Anyway, we ran to the edge of the cenote to hide. The whole area was as light as day. It was difficult to find a hiding place. The lights, white and red were so bright. You couldn't look at them," Francisco said.

"As we watched, a smaller craft came out of the big ship and it went down into the cenote. We could see it taking water out of the cenote," Aldo interjected.

"The lights from their craft lit up the cenote. It was a strange sight. We had

never seen the cenote at night," Francisco said.

"The bats went crazy," Aldo added. "After they were loaded with water, they returned to the big UFO."

"Then they made another trip and another," Francisco said. "If I remember, they made five trips to get water."

"I think they were after something besides water," Aldo said. "I'm not sure what they are after, but it seems to me, that water was not their only mission."

"Why do you believe that?" I asked.

"About three years later, we saw another event. It looked like the same craft. A smaller craft went into the cenote, but this time, a human character got out of the craft and picked up things around the cenote, like rocks and pieces of vegetation. I think they were trying to decide if they could live on this planet. They might be the new invaders," Francisco suggested.

For a moment Aldo and Francisco discussed his theory.

"In order to believe that they are coming here for something, you have to believe they exist in the first place. Correct?" Francisco asked.

"Correct," I answered.

"That is the hardest part about seeing these aliens," Francisco continued. "It is not something we talk about, but I believe they are scouting our planet. I think they want another home and since they are superior to us, they think they can take over. It will be a repeat of the conquistadores."

"What do you mean?"

Francisco continued, "They will come and some people will embrace them. Others will fight, but it is not a fight that can be won. They will take over and humans will become nothing but slaves to them."

"Why do you believe this?"

"It has been the same throughout history," Aldo said. "The invaders find the weak and they take whatever they want—land, women, gold. It is always the same."

"But there is one difference. Perhaps the aliens do not behave like humans." Francisco said.

"You may be right, Francisco. Humans are deadly, but perhaps the aliens are not. They have never done anything that is aggressive or bad, but I still think there is some other reason that they come here," Aldo said.

“It is strange. We have never discussed the UFOs before. It’s the first time that we’ve discussed these encounters with anyone.” Aldo stood. I knew the conversation was over. I watched as he looked over the single ladies sitting across from us on a bench. With a nod to Francisco, the two of them strolled over to the ladies.

The last time I caught sight of them, they had danced with every single woman in the Zocalo regardless of age, weight, or condition. Recognizing that they were two of Merida’s greatest treasures, I knew I would not soon forget the duo, who firmly believed that the aliens had an agenda.

Chapter 39
A Missing Brother and a UFO

The number of persons reported missing every year in Mesoamerica is a closely guarded secret. Since 1980, at least 20,000 children worldwide have been reported missing each year. It is estimated that two million people go missing every year around the globe. Whereas fifty percent of those missing individuals are thought to be victims of crimes or purposeful disappearances such as runaways, the other fifty percent—or one million people—have baffled authorities because there is no explanation for these disappearances. Alien abduction may be one explanation for many of these disappearances; however, human abductions by aliens are officially regarded by governments throughout the world as hoaxes. Narrative evidence continues to mount as many more people have come forward with stories of abduction.

In this chapter you will meet Evelyn. She spoke about the night a UFO visited her home and abducted her brother.

I fell in love with the city of Merida during my travels in Mexico. Several times I met with realtors searching for the perfect house. It was on one of those trips that a realtor, who questioned me about my work, told me about Evelyn. After a brief phone call, I arranged to meet her. We met at the Casa de Piedra, a restaurant frequented by Americans and Canadians. The daughter of an American expatriate and a Mestizo, we struck up a conversation about her life in Mexico. Evelyn was a tall, slender blonde with skin the color of copper. Her hair fell upon her exposed bare shoulders, making her appear like a college girl on spring break. Evelyn's mother died when she was a child. She and her sister had been raised by their father. He never remarried.

"How did your mother come to live in Mexico?" I asked.

"She came to Mexico to see the ruins in 1980 and fell in love with my father. She said he was so handsome and charming, she couldn't resist him. At the time, he lived with his parents on a hacienda about thirty kilometers (nearly 19 miles) from Merida. When he met my mother, he took her home to meet his parents, and she never left. They were married a few weeks later.

Unfortunately, when I was nine, she was diagnosed with cancer. She went to Miami and spent several months going through operations and chemotherapy. They told her she was in remission. Once she returned home, she never went back for checkups. She died when I was fourteen; Gabriella, my younger sister, was twelve."

"I'm so sorry. It is never easy to lose a mother."

"True. I had a brother, Adan," she said. "But he disappeared one night. Gabriella and I saw him the night he was taken. He never returned. That was really difficult for me."

"What do you mean, he was taken?" I asked.

"Before we talk about my brother, I want to talk about something else. Sarah told me you were interested in UFOs. I don't know if anyone else talked with you, but UFOs frequent this area."

"I have heard the same thing from others."

"Although UFOs are frequently reported in the cities, it is rare that the events that occur outside the cities are reported. Yet the local people know."

"That can be a blessing."

"True. We don't need UFO hunters here," she laughed, "although they might be good for the economy." She paused for a moment as the waitress appeared at our table and offered to refresh our coffee cups. "I haven't told anyone this story except my father, and he told me never to repeat it."

"Please, tell me about Adan."

"He was sixteen the night they took him. Almost a man."

"Who took him?"

"I'm not sure. I woke in the middle of the night and woke up Gabriella. I saw three balls of light in the backyard. On the way out of the house, we woke up Adan, and he followed us. We stood on the porch and watched them for several minutes." She paused and sipped her coffee, added sugar to it, and stirred.

"You said you saw lights."

"Yes. By that time they had become these tall beings. Not quite human, but human-looking. Adan said he was going to touch them. I called to him and told him not to go. He didn't listen. Suddenly, we saw a big flash of light. That is the last thing either of us remembered. We fell asleep on the porch. My father woke us in the morning."

“Did you tell your father what happened?”

“Not at first. We looked for Adan. We called him. Went to his room, but he wasn’t there. All day we waited. My father looked for him; we all looked for him. By evening, all the neighbors were looking for him, but he never came home. He was never found.”

“When did you tell your father about the lights?” I asked.

“Gabriella and I told him that night. We were afraid he would be angry, but instead he scoffed at the idea that a UFO abducted him.”

“What do you think happened to him?”

“My father believes that he wandered off into the jungle. Perhaps he was hurt and suffered from amnesia. Perhaps he was kidnapped, but no one ever asked for a reward. If he were kidnapped, he is probably dead. I prefer to believe the aliens took him. I know they took him. Papa still believes he will return.”

“What do you think happened to him?”

“I think aliens took him. There was a light, a blue light. It lit up the whole yard. It came from above the trees. I saw the silhouette of a UFO over the trees.”

“Did you describe what you saw to your father?” I asked.

“I told him, but he told me never to repeat such nonsense. He said I was dreaming, but I wasn’t. I know what happened that night. Those balls of light were aliens. They coaxed him into the backyard and took him. When it happened, I thought they would return him, but it has been nine years and he is still gone. My father looks for him every day.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“At first I blamed myself. If I had let him sleep, he would not have been on the veranda that night, but I did and he is gone. Some days I look for him, too. I think I’ll wake up, and everything will be normal. But it isn’t. My father has not been the same since that day. He took my mother’s death very hard, but we knew it was coming, but Adan’s disappearance was not expected.”

“Can you describe the silhouette you saw that night?” I asked.

“I could make out a circular shadow. It cast a blue light upon the ground. There were three balls of light that came out of it. They materialized into human-like figures. That is what I remember. Gabriella remembers the blue light and the balls of light, but nothing else. I know what I saw. My brother was

abducted."

"Have you seen UFOs since that night?" I asked.

"All of the time. They come and playfully zip above the trees. I have not seen the balls of light since that time. Just the spacecraft. Sometimes I wonder if Adan is there with them, checking on Dad and me. I tell myself he is, but that his job in his other world is so important, he has no time to stop in and tell us he is all right. It would help if he would do that. I believe someday he will return. I hope so. Then Dad could find some peace."

"Perhaps someday he will," I replied.

"Perhaps. It is something I hold on to."

I met Evelyn in 2004. She has since married and is the mother of a young daughter. She and her husband have taken over the management of the orange orchard and live at the hacienda with her ailing father. We remain in contact via e-mail, and I have visited her several times. On one occasion, she and her husband came to Montana and spent a week with me. She has never wavered in her belief that someday her brother will return.

Chapter 40
The Aluxes Are Aliens

In 1843, explorer John L. Stephens wrote Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, an account of his second trip through the Maya world. He related that upon his arrival at Uxmal, he met a local Maya man who was seated under a portal at the base of the Pyramid of the Magician. The man told him the legend associated with the Pyramid. He said that it had been foretold that when a certain gong was sounded, the town of Uxmal would fall to a boy "not born of woman." One day, a dwarf boy, who had been raised from an egg by a witch, sounded the gong, which struck fear into the ruler, who responded by ordering the boy to be executed. When the day of execution arrived, the ruler promised that the boy's life would be saved if he could build a giant pyramid in a single night. The boy achieved the task, and eventually, after completing several tasks, he became the new ruler of Uxmal. The elders say that he was assisted by sky beings who used huge flying machines to move stones.

The Pyramid of the Magician, the result of the dwarf's overnight building project, is the first structure a visitor encounters entering the ceremonial area of Uxmal. There are some stories that suggest that the dwarf who became the king encouraged the aluxes, or little people, to inhabit Uxmal. Augustus Le Plongeon, a British-American photographer and archaeologist, believed that a tiny race of people inhabited Uxmal. Although his theory was never accepted by the scholars of his time, he was adamant about his belief and pointed to the hundreds of tiny rooms inside the pyramid as proof of his theory.

In Mexico and Guatemala, the Maya tell stories about a tiny race of people, known as the aluxes. They are described as being small, only about knee-high, and resembling miniature, traditionally dressed Maya people. In this chapter you will hear an account of a Maya woman who encountered aluxes. She associated the little people with a UFO she had seen earlier in the evening.

Her name was Maria. She described herself as a Yucatec Maya. A woman in her late thirties, she had a round face and wide smile, which revealed front teeth capped with gold. She wore the traditional huipil, a tunic-like, white

embroidered dress worn by the women in the Yucatan. She explained that the embroidered designs around the top of her dress and at the hem represented the cosmos, the gods, and their helpers, and that when a Maya woman wears the huipil she becomes the center of this symbolically represented universe. Marriage at fourteen ended her formal education, although she admitted that one of her favorite pastimes was reading and taking English classes when they are offered by traveling tourist in need of money. As a mother of six girls, she dreamed that her girls would become schoolteachers and would be able to teach their students traditional stories of the Maya while preparing them for modern society.

"My girls know the traditional stories. Their favorite stories are about the aluxes, the little people," she said. "But there are different kinds of little people. There are the aluxes of the ancestors and there are aluxes that are strange and different from the little people known to the Maya."

"Can you explain?"

"The Maya aluxes are tiny people; maybe they come to my knees. These new aluxes are taller." She held her hand slightly above her waist. I estimated the creatures she had seen were closer to two-and-a-half to three feet tall.

"Where did you see them?" I asked.

"I was looking for wood. It is difficult to find wood today. I have to walk long distances. I saw them in a clump of trees."

"How many?

"There were six. They were standing around this round ball of light."

"Can you describe the light?"

"It was bluish-white. Very bright. They linked arms and stood very still. Like small monuments."

"Do you have any idea what they were doing?"

"They just stood there and for a while I watched, but then I got afraid. I worried they might discover me and I slipped away. When I was out of sight, I ran to the main highway. A neighbor came along and gave me a ride in his truck."

"Why did you become afraid?" I asked.

"Earlier in the evening, I saw a metal object in the sky. It was very fast and fleeting. I told myself it was just a plane and ignored it. As I stood there, watching these six little men, who were not aluxes, I thought perhaps they

belonged to that object. Then, I got afraid."

"Did you see the UFO again?"

"As I said, as I got back to the highway, I met my neighbor. He stopped and I climbed into the back of his truck. I was trembling and cold, and yet it was warm outside, even in the nighttime."

"And the UFO?"

"We were driving along, and that is when I saw it again. It came out of the trees where I had been standing. It came over the truck and hovered there. I was so frightened."

"Did the driver see it?"

"Yes. He pulled to the side of the highway. I was screaming for him to drive and get home, but he ignored me. He climbed into the back of the truck and waved at the craft. I was sure they were going to do something to us."

"But they didn't," I said.

"No. They flew upward and then they were gone."

"Have you seen them since that time?"

"No. But I know they were not the aluxes of the Maya. The real aluxes are smaller and dress like the old Maya. These little men did not dress like Maya. They wore glowing uniforms. They stood around the glowing light. I thought for a moment they were praying. I can tell you that their heads were too big for their bodies. That seemed strange to me."

"Can you describe the spacecraft?"

"Only that it was round and big and metal. There was a strange smell and when they flew over us, I felt a mist. The next day I was sick and stayed in bed. For a long time, I was weak. I am stronger now. I have to be strong for my husband and girls. I have to work."

"Did you have a rash?"

"Only trouble breathing and a weakness in my bones. I think these aluxes were aliens. I don't know why they are here or what they are doing, but I tell my girls to stay away from shaded areas. It is a dangerous world we live in today."

I have seen Maria several times since our initial meeting. She is a waitress at one of my favorite hotels in the Yucatan. When she sees me enter the restaurant, she immediately comes to my table so that we can visit. Although she has not

seen any more small aliens, she continues to believe that the little men she saw in the forests were not aluxes.

Chapter 41
The Great Mystery

On their second expedition to the Yucatan in 1841, Stephens and Catherwood explored the area around Uxmal and discovered the remains of several other ancient cities, including Kabah, Sayil, and Labna. They published an illustrated description of Sayil in their 1843 book, Incidents of Travel in Yucatan. They referred to the site as "Zayi."

During my first visit to the sites, I stayed at the Mayaland Lodge of Uxmal and used it as a base for my travels around the Yucatan. Sayil lies south of Uxmal. One afternoon I visited the ancient site. I met an artist who lived near Sayil. As we discussed his artwork and the intricate, wooden carving of the sarcophagus of Pakal I purchased, we talked about UFOs. He told me a story about an event that happened to him as a child.

In this chapter you will read Jorge's story.

"In those days, we had a good life. We had some land, chickens, and pigs. My father had honey bees. We grew corn and peppers. We had fruit trees in the backyard. We had no electricity, no cell phones, cars, or running water. But we were happy. We knew nothing of radio, television, or airplanes. We knew nothing of UFOs. We knew nothing of things that flew through the air." Jorge paused and lit a cigarette. He took his time, blowing smoke into the hot, humid air before continuing. He wore jeans and a t-shirt, and a wide-brimmed straw hat to protect him from the relentless sun. Sisal sandals protected his feet. A small, sinewy man with skin the color of cinnamon, his arms were muscular, obviously from carving the hardwoods. He asked his wife to take over the sales counter as he led me to the back of the open-air tent and to shade.

"How old were you when you had your first encounter with a UFO?" I asked as we settled on a bench near the back of the tent.

"Eight years old or so."

"Can you tell me about the encounter?"

"It was a beautiful evening. I remember it was a full moon. We decided to

walk to our cousins. They lived less than a half kilometer (.3 miles) away. The moon lit our way. After we visited, we started our walk home. By that time it was dark. Clouds had come up and hid the moon."

"Who was with you?" I asked.

"My brother. He was older. About ten years old. When we caught sight of the house we raced each other to the backyard. We needed to latch the chicken pen and make sure the hogs were safe. Our mama hog had nine little piglets and we had to make sure they were all safely locked up for the night."

"Was your brother with you at that time?"

"Yes. He was helping me. Just as we latched the chicken pen, a very bright light filled the backyard. I jumped back behind the chicken pen and my brother, too. We were frightened. We watched as the light changed from a very bright white to orange and then blue."

"So the blinding light changed. Is that what you are saying?"

"Yes. It was just a beautiful glow. A warm feeling."

"Did the light shine on you?"

"I don't remember. I only remember the light moving slowly over the trees, and then it disappeared. There was no sound. Only this warm feeling."

"What did you do once the light was gone?"

"We ran into the house and lay down for fear it would come back and see us. We waited for maybe an hour, and then the sun started to come up. We were more confused than ever. It had only been a few minutes ago when we were at our cousins' house. How could it be daylight? We were confused."

"Do you have any recollection of being taken onboard a UFO?"

"None. My brother said that two strange men appeared near our chicken pen, but I never saw them. He said they were like machines."

"What did he mean when he said they were like machines?"

"I remember he said they walked strange, like a wind-up tin toy we had."

"What were they doing at your chicken house?"

"I am not sure."

"Did they steal your chickens?"

"That is the great mystery. One of our chickens was gone and had been replaced by a strange chicken. It was totally black. We had no black chickens. My mother was upset. She thought it was a devil chicken, and she killed it and

we ate it. It tasted like a regular chicken. Mama said if you kill evil and eat it, it cannot hurt you."

"Can you tell me more about the two men?"

"I did not see them. If I did, I don't remember. I was so frightened that I panicked. I could not talk for days. I was that scared. I had large red bump on my arm and my stomach hurt. I had a high fever. My mother worried about me, but as the days passed, she thought I was cursed by the Devil. My father and his friends performed religious ceremonies. Eventually, I got out of the hammock and walked around, and soon I was back to my old self."

"Did you tell your mother what happened to you?"

"No. We told our cousins, and they laughed at us. They said we were imagining things in the night. They laughed so hard we never told another person. We just kept it to ourselves."

"Have you seen other UFOs since that time?"

"Two times. Once when I was about fourteen. I was working with my brother. We were harvesting our corn. It was a hot, sunny day. There was not a cloud in the sky when it came. It was a round, silver object. Not too big, but big enough to block out the sun. They landed in the field near us. We hid behind a rock so they would not see us."

"Did they discover you?"

"I didn't remember anything after they landed. My brother said that he saw two men again."

"Did he tell you how tall they were?"

"About one meter (3 1/3 feet). They were funny looking too. All the same color and skin like a blue squash. No wrinkles like a newborn baby but blue skin. Have you ever seen a blue squash?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember the color of the squash?"

"Yes."

"That was the exact color of their skin according to my brother. He said they were not from around here. We had nobody who looked like that."

"Where does your brother live?"

"He died two years ago. I blame the UFO and those strange men. He always believed they took him and did awful things to him. He was never

strong after that first night. Always sick. My mother protected him from our father. He became an artist, too. He was better than me. I use to sell his artwork. We were partners until the end."

"What kind of things did the men do to your brother?"

"They stuck needles in his head and belly like they were doctors. But he said they were no doctors. They just acted like doctors."

"Why did he believe they were not doctors?"

"Because he was not in a hospital. He was in some strange place that smelled evil. It made him sick instead of feeling good. That is not a doctor's office. A doctor is suppose to make you feel better. These men made him feel bad."

"Can you tell me anything else?"

"I saw another UFO when I was about thirty-five. By that time, I knew more about them. My son learned about them in school. He told me that these machines came from the sky. I am not sure about that. If they are so smart, why would they steal a chicken and replace it with one that doesn't belong to us? They have to be stupid to do such a thing. It is the biggest mystery of my life."

I remember Jorge nearly every night when I make sure my chickens are safely inside their coop and away from raccoons, foxes, skunks, and any other night predators that traverse my backyard. I always look at the night sky but so far, there has been no attempt to replace my chickens with an alien one, although I do have two solid black girls among my flock. The farm co-op salesman said they originated in Australia, not space.

Chapter 42
The Healers

It is unknown how many people experience UFO healings. Thomas E. Bullard, a well-known American folklorist who has examined UFO encounters as folklore, conducted a study of270 abduction accounts and concluded that four percent (thirteen cases) experienced UFO healings. He reported in The Myth and Mystery of UFOs that many of the cures appeared to be the result of a "deliberate intervention" and that the cures required advanced medical expertise. In other words, diseases that were beyond human medical science appeared to be easily cured by extraterrestrials.

In this chapter, you will meet Salvador, who was diagnosed as being in the last stages of lung cancer and was cured by an "angel from the stars."

I met Salvador through his wife, Carla, a Maya woman I met at a small village near Uxmal. Her father was a close friend of my driver, Auturo. Auturo, who had picked me up at my Merida hotel, had been recommended by the concierge. Once I climbed into his van, he asked if I minded if we stopped off at his cousin's house so that he could deliver some cornbread from his wife. When we arrived at Carla's house, we were greeted by several children, who rushed to Auturo and hugged him. He reached in his pocket and handed each of them candies and coins.

"My nephews and nieces. Uncle Auturo always brings them treats," he said, referring to himself. Carla appeared in the doorway and welcomed us into her home. She introduced me to her two sisters. Dressed identically in white embroidered huipils, they could have passed for triplets. We were shown to the backyard, where a small table was set with refreshments. Auturo spoke to the women in the regional Mayan dialect as we sat in the shaded backyard and drank freshly squeezed orange juice. As he explained that I was following the path of Stephens and Catherwood, the women nodded in unison and smiled knowingly. When he explained that I was also collecting stories about UFOs and Star People encounters, the trio fell silent momentarily and began discussing the various sightings of unexplained UFOs that frequented the

area. Speaking in a combination of the Mayan language and Spanish, I was able to understand some of their discussion.

"Carla says she has seen UFOS many times," Auturo said. He paused as she continued, and then translated. "Once she saw a V-shaped craft with red lights." She outlined the shape on the table. "She said that it hovered over her village."

"Would you ask her to describe what happened?"

"It came from the west. It hovered over the village, shining lights on the village below."

"We were frightened. We thought it meant us harm." She paused and looked at the women. They nodded approval and she continued. "Then, it turned, and before our eyes it disappeared. Later that night, four lights appeared in our home. My husband was ill. The doctors said he had lung cancer from years of smoking and they sent him home to die. He had trouble breathing. He could no longer walk or feed himself. It took all of his energy to breathe. My sisters and I cared for him. One of us was always by his side." She paused, allowing Auturo the opportunity to translate.

"Is her husband still alive?" I asked Auturo.

"Sí. He is very healthy."

"How did that happen?"

"She says that the UFOS carried angels who healed him."

"Did she see the angels?"

"I don't think so," Auturo responded. I waited as they spoke in Mayan. The other two women joined in the conversation. "She says the Star Men healed her husband. She says that if you want to meet her husband, he will be home in another hour. He is working in the orchard now. He will come home for lunch." Carla excused herself to prepare lunch. Her sisters disappeared with her.

"Auturo, did you know about the UFO incident?"

"Sí. I was not sure she would tell her story. She is very reluctant to talk to strangers. But I told her that you were Indios. She has never met an Indios woman from the U.S.A. She wants to share her husband's story."

"I am honored."

"When Salvador arrives, please give me time to speak with him. I think he will agree to tell his story, but I want to approach him first. He is a private

man, and his story is amazing. I think I can convince him to talk."

"I will follow your lead."

No more than twenty minutes had passed when Salvador entered the backyard. Auturo and Salvador greeted each other and spoke briefly. Auturo turned to me and introduced us. "Salvador speaks some English and Spanish. He worked at Uxmal as a guide when he was younger. After his father died, he took over the orchard and took care of his mother until she passed."

"I am happy to meet you, Señora," Salvador said. I looked at the man, slightly bent, from the years of toiling in the fields. He was old for his age, and yet there was a glint in his eye that confirmed he was full of life. He stood barefoot before me, his feet caked with the dirt of the fields, and yet he appeared almost regal in his demeanor. He was a man reborn, according to his wife, and he displayed the confidence of a man who expected to live a long life.

"I told Salvador that you were following the route of Stephens and Catherwood. He is impressed."

"My third-ago grandfather served as a guide for Stephens and Catherwood. He worked at the hacienda in those days and the owner gave permission for him to go with the two to Uxmal. He helped care for Catherwood, who became so ill with malaria before they returned to New York. When they returned to Uxmal a year later, Stephens and Catherwood requested that he accompany them on their return trip to the site."

"What is a third-ago grandfather?" I asked.

"It is a great-great-great grandfather, I believe—three grandfathers before his grandfather."

"Tell him I am very impressed. I feel like I am touching history." Auturo explained to Salvador what my comment meant, and he smiled and nodded.

"The señora is also collecting stories about UFOS," Auturo said. "Carla told her about your healing. Would you be willing to share your story with her?" Salvador nodded, removed his straw hat, and wiped his brow with a rag he pulled from his back pocket.

"I was close to death," he said, pausing as though remembering his illness. "The priest had been called to my bedside twice, but I kept holding on, waiting for a miracle from Jesus. The doctors had given up on me." I saw his wife walk to his side and bring a fresh pitcher of orange juice. He looked at her and

nodded before continuing. “The night the UFOS came, I could see the lights from my hammock. The whole outside was red. I did not know what was going on. Carla came in and told me what she saw. I prayed to God it was my miracle, but my breathing stayed the same.” He paused when Carla appeared with a plate of tortillas and beans. Salvador filled a tortilla and passed the plate to me. I passed the plate to Auturo. We ate and drank orange juice in silence. Salvador ate another plateful of tortillas before he spoke again. “It was later that night. I fell asleep. A bright light woke me. The room was like a full sun had come up, but that was not true. Five balls of light circled my hammock. They slowly went up and down my body. One centered over my head and stayed there.” He pointed to his forehead. “It was warm and felt good. The others centered on my chest, which became very warm. Suddenly I could breathe. I sat up and the balls of light went out the door. I followed them and just as they reached the backyard, I saw them. Five men came out of the balls of light. They stopped and looked at me. I saw a beam of light come from the trees above, and they disappeared upward into the light. I watched as the V-shaped machine moved upward. Red lights outlined it. It climbed into the sky and then it was gone.”

“Where was Carla at this time?”

“She slept. She did not hear or see.”

“When did you tell her about what happened to you?”

“I woke her up. I knew I was healed. She was shocked and worried. She wanted me to sit down, but I was too excited. For the first time in years, I could breathe easily.”

“When did this happen?” I asked.

“Four years ago. The doctors said there was no sign of cancer. They did not understand. They said it was a miracle, but I knew that it was the angels sent by Jesus to take care of me. Otherwise I would be gone. Father Felipe said it was a miracle,” he said, referring to the local Catholic priest.

“Where do you think the Star Men came from?”

“I think they live in heaven with Jesus. And if you believe in Jesus and you are faithful, he will answer your prayers.”

I often think of Salvador and the power of prayer. He prayed faithfully every day believing that Jesus would heal him. In the end, it took the intervention of his “Star Angels” to do just that. I haven’t forgotten his last words: “I pray

every day," he said. "Prayer is power."

Chapter 43
They Avoid Tourists

Five decades ago, no one knew about Cancun. In 1969 a huge building project was launched and by 1974, an international airport and three luxury hotels had been built to draw tourists. Today, Cancun is one of the premier holiday destinations in North America.

In this chapter, you will hear from an elder who tells how the "real" Sky People quit coming to the Yucatan with the advent of the tourist industry.

I was at the Lodge at Uxmal, across the street from the ancient city by the same name, when my driver told me about an elder in a neighboring village who had encountered a UFO and that, if I were interested, he would take me to meet him. Auturo, who was born in the same village, had known this man all of his life and vouched for his honesty and sincerity. When we arrived at his home, I was greeted by his wife, children, and grandchildren. After I gave the children coloring books, crayons, and huckleberry jelly beans, they disappeared inside one of the huts.

Choc, the elder who had agreed to talk with me, came from the back of the house and welcomed us. I was immediately mesmerized by his smile. He held out his hand to me. His gentle, warm touch put me at ease. He offered us orange juice from his orchard while he arranged some wooden stools for us to sit. "When I was a boy they used to come here. They quit coming in the mid-seventies."

"Do you have any idea why they stopped visiting the area?"

"The old ones say they disapproved of the tourists coming to the area. The Yucatan was the home of the Maya until the 1960s. The Mexicans left us alone. The government left us alone. The Men from the Stars considered the Yucatan their second home, but after the tourists came, the purity of the Yucatan was lost. The Sky People don't like tourists." I understood the changes he was addressing. The development of Cancun had made for drastic alterations throughout the Yucatan.

“Do you remember the days when the Sky People came to visit?” I asked.

“Sí.”

“Can you tell me about those days?”

“I remember this one time. It was a celebration. All of the old men from the village and nearby villages were present. We feasted on turkey, peppers, beans, and tortillas. There was so much food. When all of a sudden over the village, a sky machine appeared.”

“Can you describe it?” I asked.

“It was round and big. It covered the whole village. It turned a bright sunny day into a dark day. It shaded the sun. Blue sparks of light spit out from underneath. It was quite a sight for a boy like me. I had never seen lights before. It stayed that way for the longest time, and everyone just sat there staring upward at this object from the sky.”

“Was there any fear?”

“No. We knew about the Sky People. We were not afraid of them. The sky machine hung overhead for what seemed like a long time but it was probably only minutes. Then three Sky Men appeared. They walked directly to the elders and escorted them onboard the ship. After an hour or so the elders came out of the ship.”

“Can you describe the Sky Men?” I asked.

“They looked like us, except they were taller. We were a shorter version of them.”

“Did the elders tell you anything about their meeting?”

“Only that they talked about the future of the Earth, and how the population growth and greed would bring about its destruction.”

“Did they explain to you how this might occur?”

“They said diseases, no food, and wars would destroy the Earth as we know it.” He got up and motioned for me to follow him. I walked with him to a cement enclosure near the back of his property. Three hogs were asleep in the encircled pen. They stood on their hind legs at his approach as though seeking affection. He scratched the heads of each as they squealed softly showing their approval. “These are my girls,” he said. “They produce piglets. They feed me when I sell their babies. That way I make money for other things. They are my independence.” He paused and threw a bag of corn cobs into the pen.

“Several years ago, a spacecraft came. It hovered over my place. A strange

space man, unlike those of long ago days, appeared in my yard and tried to steal one of my hogs. She was my prized mama. I fought him for her. When he released her, he ran underneath the craft and was sucked up. The craft immediately sped away, and I never saw it again."

"You speak of a strange space man. Was he different from the Sky Men of your elders?"

"Sí. These space men were different. They were hostile. They were short and wore strange suits. They were skin-tight and bright and glossy. I wondered how they could live in such suits in the heat. I know I could not do it."

"You said 'they.' Was there more than one alien?"

"Sí. There was the one that tried to steal my hog and there was another one who stood and watched, and when I fought, the other one came forward and motioned through hand signals that the thief should give up and leave my hogs alone. They looked like identical twins. There was no difference in their height, weight, or appearance."

"Could you tell anything about their faces?"

"They were blank. I saw no mouth or ears. Their heads were covered. They covered their eyes with strange, round, black goggles. My son said that they were probably glasses to help them see."

"Did any other members of your family witness the attempted theft of your pig?" I asked.

"My wife. She was very afraid I would be killed. I remember her calling my name as I struggled to keep my hog. After they left, we had difficulty sleeping. The next morning, I had red spots and blisters on my hands and the right side of my face."

"Did you see a doctor?"

"No. We used a salve my wife made, and it went away in a week. That alien made me sick. He was not from the Sky People of my grandfather's day. My grandfather said the Sky People looked like us."

"You spoke about a machine that came from the sky and the elders entered the machine to speak with the Sky Men. I have heard that the elders could travel in space. Can you tell me anything about that?" I asked.

"There is a place on each pyramid that is the portal to the stars. The elders would enter the portal to travel in space. The elders traveled to meet with the Sky People. That is how they knew so much about the universe."

“Do they continue to do that today?” I asked.

Choc paused and finished his glass of orange juice. “When the tourists came, the Sky People chose to stay away. The portals were closed. We believe someday they will open again, but not until the tourists leave.”

“Do you believe that there will be a day when there are no tourists?”

“Oh sí. It is coming. The day will come when the world is too dangerous for travel, and people will stay home. Cancun will be replaced by jungle again.”

“Why will it become too dangerous to travel?”

“There will be diseases at first. People will be afraid to leave their homes. Food will become scarce because there will be no one to produce it. Then the wars will come.”

“What do you think will happen to the Maya when these events occur?”

“We will survive. We have always survived. We will just disappear into the jungles and wait until the Earth is reborn and the fifth world begins. It has been foretold by the wise men. It will happen. You should take heed.”

I have often thought about Choc and his explanation for the lack of star visitors coming to the Yucatan. Perhaps he is right. Tourists are everywhere and on certain days it is almost impossible to enjoy the sites. Although it is good for the economy and has raised many of the local people out of poverty, it is impossible to visit the Yucatan without recognizing the price that has been paid. It is not hard to understand why the Sky People have deserted the Yucatan.

Chapter 44
Viva Mexico!

Kiuic has been visited by archaeologists since at least 1841, when John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood recorded the site for the Incidents of Travel in Yucatan. Some of the ruins Stephens recorded in his book still stood when I visited there in 2009, despite the fact that little restoration had taken place. Kiuic was not the easiest site to find. Located in the Bolonchen District of the Puuc region of Yucatan, the Helen Moyers Biocultural Reserve is a privately owned entity managed by Kaxil Kiuic, A.C. It consists of 4,000 acres of dry tropical forest and contains the ancient Maya center of Kiuic as well as the remains of the historic community of San Sebastian.

At the time of our visit, my companions and I were unaware that Kiuic was a part of a privately owned preserve. Upon locating the entrance to the site, we found an unlocked gate and drove through it. We spent approximately two hours at the site and never saw any workers or other tourists. When we came upon a "No Trespassing" sign, my driver was convinced that the three of us would end up in a Mexican prison if discovered, and we left the site immediately. As we exited the gate, we encountered a group of young men on bicycles. We stopped and chatted with them. Our conversation inspired this chapter.

"We are practicing for a cross-country race," the head rider told us. He, along with four other bicyclists, was resting outside the gate as we exited the Kiuic site.

"Is this place open?" one of the bicyclists asked.

"The gate was unlocked and we drove inside," my driver explained.

"The archaeologists are probably in Merida," another rider said. "They go there on the weekends."

"Are you guys a part of a bicycling tour group?" I asked.

"We are a team that hopes to represent Mexico in international competitions someday," Rodrigo said. Then he pointed to his friends. "This is

Pablo, the shortest of the group; David, the tallest; Jonathan, the girl-magnet; Emiliano, the youngest; and me, Rodrigo. I am the best of the group." He smiled while the others laughed.

"How long have you been training?"

"Six months. We practice at night, on weekends, after work and school. We want to be the best," Rodrigo said. "We want to represent Mexico."

"Viva Mexico!" they yelled in unison.

"We have endured hurricanes, winds, rainstorms, topes (speed bumps), speeding cars, drug smugglers, military checkpoints, gun battles, union marches, protest demonstrations, and UFOs," Rodrigo added.

"I am interested in UFO stories. Do you have a story?" I asked. After my guide explained my mission, Rodrigo, who was clearly the leader, looked at his four companions. Then he motioned toward the shade of a tall tree, and eight of us (the five bicyclists, my driver, my guide, and I) sat down. My driver retrieved eight bottles of ice water from the van, passed them around, and joined us, as the young man named Pablo began the story.

"It was a black night. High winds were making it difficult to ride our bikes. We saw lightning off in the distance as we raced for our village," he said.

"We are all from the same village and we were about three kilometers (1.8 miles) from home," Rodrigo interjected. "The rains came in waves across the highway. We saw bright lights ahead. We thought there was a wreck."

"But the closer we got to the lights, the more blinding they became," Pablo continued. "That's when we realized that something was wrong."

"I told my buddies to stay back while I investigated," Rodrigo said.

"But he didn't come back," Pablo explained. "We got worried and decided to follow him."

"How long did you wait?"

"Thirty minutes?" Pablo said. He looked at the others and they nodded. "We decided to look for him, but we still didn't realize it was a UFO. As we approached the source of the lights, we recognized the outline of some sort of a craft. As we came closer the lights softened and turned to red. I told the others to stay behind me, away from the light. We called out to Rodrigo, but no response." Pablo picked up a small rock at his feet and threw it into the field. "I must admit, I was afraid. I told the guys not to yell, because if aliens had Rodrigo, they might come after us. We looked around for any sign of life. We

saw nothing. We looked around for other people, but there was no one on the road. We were alone." He paused and took a long drink from the water bottle and stood.

"Did you go closer to the craft?" I asked.

"We decided to move off the highway and take shelter in a small tree-belt by the highway and wait," Pablo continued. "It was about ten minutes when we saw the craft lift upward a few feet, and a light came from underneath, and suddenly a door opened from the bottom of the craft. A stairway descended. That's when we saw them. There were eleven of them."

"Eleven aliens?"

"No. Eleven humans," said Pablo. "They all came out of the UFO. Rodrigo was the second to appear. I ran toward him and pulled him out of the light. But the others just stood there with nowhere to go. The UFO suddenly moved upward. Within seconds, it was gone. All around us was darkness. We had one flashlight. I shined it in the direction of the others. They wandered in a circle, obviously confused. Rodrigo babbled about something we did not understand."

"At this point, what did you do?" I asked.

"We decided to stay there until someone from the village came for us. Andres gathered some wood and we built a fire so if someone came along, they would see us and slow down. We herded all the people to the side of the road and made them sit down," Pablo said.

"Did anyone come for you?" I asked.

"My father came looking for me. He loaded everyone into the back of his pickup and took us to the village. We told everyone what happened. Some of the women began praying. My father ordered the people to bring extra hammocks and he hung them in trees and put the strangers to bed. The next morning, when they woke, they did not know where they were or what happened to them. Rodrigo was fine," Pablo said.

"I did not know any of the people who were with me," Rodrigo said. "One man was from Mexico City, there were three from Merida, one from Valladolid, two from Vera Cruz, and I can't remember the others. But they were from all around Mexico."

"Did any of them remember how they came to be on the UFO?" I asked.

"No. None of them remembered anything. I did not remember anything either," Rodrigo said. "I don't know what they did to me, but after that, I was

the fastest bicyclist in Mexico. Maybe they did something to make me faster."

"Or maybe all your work paid off."

"Yeah. Maybe it was me," he replied.

"What happened to the others?" I asked.

"As far as we know, they all went home. My father took them to the bus station. We never saw them again," Pablo said.

"What about you, Rodrigo? What do you think happened to you?"

"I don't know, Señora. I don't even remember the UFO."

I often think of the bicyclists I met that day on my visit to Kiuic. I never pass a group of bicyclists on the highway without being reminded of that group. I often think of Rodrigo's belief that the UFO had given him supernatural powers and made him a more powerful rider. Though it was hard for me to wrap my mind around such an incident, I suppose stranger things have happened.

Chapter 45
The Sky Gods Cried, Too

Stephens and Catherwood visited Izamal in 1843. As mentioned in their book Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, mounds stood between houses throughout the city. The mounds were concealed temples and other structures of a Maya city. Following the Spanish conquest of the Yucatan, a colonial city was founded atop the existing Maya one; however, it was decided that it would take a prohibitively large amount of work to level two huge temples that stood in the center of the village. Therefore, the Spanish built a large Franciscan church atop the acropolis. Completed in 1561, the atrium of the monastery was second in size only to that at the Vatican.

On July 12, 1562, Friar Diego De Landa burned 5,000 idols and 27 manuscripts at Mani, a nearby village. He destroyed all but three Maya Codices. With most records destroyed, little is known as to why the Maya felt Izamal was a site of such great importance. Landa was later exiled to Spain for his crimes against the indigenous Maya and forced to document what he had witnessed in the Yucatan. By 1566, Landa completed Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan (An Account of Things in the Yucatan), although the ancient history of the Maya could never be recovered. Much to the chagrin of the Maya, Landa later returned to Izamal as the bishop of the Yucatan.

In this chapter, you will meet a family who claims the Sky Gods have been coming to Izamal for 700 years.

I was invited to visit the Garcia family by my driver. He described them as a typical middle-class Maya family who spoke both the local Maya dialect and Spanish with some English. The father still conducted the ancient ceremonies of the Maya and was highly regarded in his community. I was excited about spending the afternoon with them and had been invited to enjoy an afternoon meal. On my way to their home, I stopped and bought Fanta soft drinks, Coca-Cola, bottled water, canned milk, cocoa, and various cooking spices for the mother.

The Garcia family lived on the outskirts of Izamal. There were six children,

a mother, a father, and one grandchild. They farmed corn on their land. They grew peppers in old rusted coffee cans and limes, mangoes, bananas, coriander, mint, and chaya, a common Maya spice, in their backyard. Two bee hives and a pig pen with four hogs graced the yard near the back fence. Numerous chickens roamed freely throughout their property. There were five buildings on the land. One was for cooking with a traditional stove (three rocks and a metal pan), and one for storing seed and dried food. Another was set aside for activities such as sewing, watching TV, and relaxing. The room contained a black and white television set and a treadle sewing machine. Two others were for sleeping; the nine of them shared five hammocks. The floor was dirt. Two plastic storage boxes contained all of their clothes and other personal possessions. A prayer altar stood behind one of the huts. Nine wooden bowls were stored beneath and used in traditional prayer ceremonies.

When I arrived at the family's house, I was ushered to the backyard by the children, who showed me around. We talked about school, their dreams, and their favorite TV shows. The oldest child, a girl who was fifteen, took me into the cooking hut and showed me how to make corn tortillas. Her mother, Maria, was busy making the fillings for the tortillas.

After lunch I was ushered to the backyard with the father, Herberto. We sat on homemade benches. Herberto reached above him, pulled a mango from the tree above us, and offered it to me. "My grandfather once told me that the Sky Gods came back to Izamal to meet with the people of knowledge who lived here in the good times. Mango was their favorite fruit."

"Who were the people of knowledge?"

"The people of knowledge were the messengers—the intermediaries between Earth and the Sky Gods," Herberto said.

"And can you please tell me about the 'good times'?'"

"The good times were the old times before the Spanish came."

"Do the Sky Gods still come to Izamal?"

"They come, but they do not stop to interact with the people. Now it is more like observation. They were so saddened by the actions of Bishop Landa, who was responsible for the destruction of our recorded knowledges and objects of worship and the ignorance of the Spaniards, they decided to leave the Earth to its own devices. My grandfather said that the wise men who survived Landa cried and cried. Their howls of anguish were heard by the Sky Gods, who came to Earth. They came to comfort the people, but the loss was

so great, the Sky Gods cried, too." He paused for a moment and spoke in Mayan to my guide.

"He wants you to go to the church in Mani. He says that you will understand what happened when you go to there," my guide translated.

"Isn't Mani the town where Landa destroyed all the religious symbols and Maya books?"

"Sí," Herberto said. "But what is not commonly known is that underneath the church in Mani, there is a tunnel. At one time, my grandfather said it connected the town of Mani to Izamal. After the Spaniards came, hundreds of years passed before anyone ventured into the tunnel. The Maya knew what was there. But when the explorers went there, they discovered over ten thousand skeletons in the tunnel. So many it blocked the way. Landa not only destroyed the books of the Maya, but he supervised the murder, the genocide, of all of the holy men and the believers in the Maya way. My grandfather said that anyone who would not become a Christian was killed. Once you became a Christian you became a slave to the church. They built their church with the slave labor of the Maya."

"I have never heard these things before."

"No and you never will. It is a part of our history that is kept secret. The real people know. We have passed it on to our children. They retell to their children. It is the only way that the people will remember. The Maya do not forget. We are good at keeping secrets."

I left the Garcia family in the late evening. Izamal remains a place of pilgrimage in the Yucatan, now for the veneration of Roman Catholic saints. Several saints' statues at Izamal are said to perform miracles. And yet there is a population in Izamal that does not practice Catholicism. They have been the underground harbingers of the indigenous way. Herberto Garcia is at the forefront of protecting that knowledge. He was an impressive man and not one that I will ever forget.

Chapter 46
The Little People of El Rey

In 1841 Stephens and Catherwood spent a night at Nesue but did not report seeing any ruins. The next day they wrote that they saw a few temples but, because of the intense heat and sand flies, they did not think they were worth investigating. In 1877 Augustus Le Plongeon and his wife described the ruins of a city they called Nizucte (Nesue), which is known as El Rey today. Le Plongeon believed the tiny shrines lining the shores were built by a race of little people.

In this chapter you will meet Marco. He believes, like Le Plongeon, that little people lived at El Rey and could possibly still occupy it.

"It's the little things that make you a believer," Marco said. We sat in the shade of a tree on the edge of the ocean admiring the turquoise blue water lapping at our feet. I met Marco through a taxi driver on the tourist strip in Cancun. When I climbed into his cab, I asked him if there was anyone in Cancun who knew about the aluxes, the little people, of El Rey. Without saying a word, he took me to see Marco. When I first saw him, I understood this was a man who was one with nature. He was walking barefoot on the beach; a pair of ancient Nikes tied with tattered shoelaces hung over his shoulder. The hems of his jeans were frayed and faded white at all the stress points. The sleeves of his tattered t-shirt had been removed, and a replica of an ancient Maya medallion hung around his neck on a piece of cord. A makeshift tent had been erected under a tree with an orange tarpaulin and tree branches. As far as I could determine, Marco made his home on the beach despite the fact that the tourist strip was made up exclusively of luxury hotels and condos only a couple of hundred feet away from his hidden residence.

"How long have you lived in Cancun?" I asked.

"All of my life."

"When did you first hear about the aluxes?" I asked, referring to the little people.

“When I was a small boy, maybe four or five. My grandfather told the stories to me. He said that to know the aluxes is to know the magic of the ancient Maya. If you visit El Rey, you may encounter an alux. But you must be very careful. If you are intuitive, it will be to your advantage.”

“Please, can you explain?”

“Few adults ever see aluxes as little people. The aluxes are capable of many disguises. Much of the time, they masquerade as lifeless forms. I have also seen them impersonate snakes, monkeys, raccoons, parrots, bats, lizards, turtles, and pigs, but mostly they impersonate iguana. That is the reason that intuition is helpful. Without it, people walk by and never realize that they have seen the aluxes. Most people are blind to these phenomena.”

“If I were to see an alux in human form, what would I expect to see?”

“Aluxes are ancient spirits. They have lived on Earth since it was formed. My grandfather said they were the first inhabitants of the planet. When the Maya came, they befriended the little people.”

“Are the aluxes angry entities or are they playful?” I asked.

“They can be both,” Marco replied. “Like children, they are diminutive, but also their personality can be that of a child. They are happy little creatures and playful. They love playing tricks on humans, and for most part they are harmless. If you make them angry however, they are also like children. They throw tantrums and can be vindictive.” He stood and brushed the sand off his threadbare jeans and lit a cigarette.

“How do I avoid making them angry?”

“It is a good thing to keep them happy, because of their mystic power. Mystic powers can be used for both good and evil. I always tell my nieces and nephews: Stay on their good side. Leave food for them and drinks. They love Coca-Cola and alcoholic beverages. So keep that in mind when you go into the jungle.”

“Is there a way to increase my chances of seeing an alux?”

“My grandfather told me that if you are quiet and still, and enjoy the sights and smells of the rainforest, the aluxes will see that and may reveal themselves. They actually like to interact with people, but not always the way that humans interact with one another.”

“Can you explain what you mean?”

“The alux may appear to your senses. You may hear a rustling sound, or you

may see a fleeting shadow. You may never see the alux in a human form. But then again, if the alux perceives you of good heart, you may see them." He paused again and relit his cigarette, which had gone out. "Just keep in mind they may reveal themselves to you as an ordinary phenomenon, such as a sound, a feeling, a smell, or a sight. Just open your mind and they will come."

"I have heard that the aluxes built the small shrines at El Rey," I said. "What can you tell me about that?"

"I believe that the Maya and the aluxes once lived together, harmoniously. But things changed at some point and they went into the jungle or retreated to the ancient cities."

"Do you think they once lived in El Rey?"

"Some people say they are still there," Marco said.

"Are you one of those people?"

Marco paused and looked out toward the water. He shielded his eyes and looked closer at a boat that was passing by and then continued. "Señora, if I tell you they live at El Rey, what do you think might happen?" he asked. "Think about it." He paused again. "The tourists will come and they will pick up every rock to see if there is an alux. I can tell you this much: At one time the aluxes lived in the great cities, but most have retreated to the rainforest, just like the Lacandon, but keep in mind, I am emphasizing 'most.' It was their only way to survive."

"Is there anything else you can tell me about them?"

"I can tell you to listen, feel, taste, and be aware of everything around you. In time, the aluxes will come to you."

After giving Marcos 200 pesos for food, I asked the waiting cab driver to take me to El Rey. There in the shadow of the Sheraton Cancun Resort lay the ancient city. The original name of the site was unknown and was called El Rey, meaning "the king" in Spanish. The name was in honor of an elaborately decorated headdress surrounding a human face that was found there. Today the head of the king is in the Archaeological Museum of Cancun.

As I walked through El Rey with the cab driver and the kiosk ticket seller, I saw dozens of iguana basking in the sun. Perhaps they were aluxes who came to greet me. Before leaving the site, I left a can of Coca-Cola in the shade of one of the monuments.

EPILOGUE

When Stephens and Catherwood set out to explore Central America and Mexico in 1839, the idea that an advanced civilization had created great cities hidden in the jungles was considered extreme by the academic world. Up until the day they left, they were discouraged in their endeavor, as many of their colleagues considered their planned expedition madness.

The public, however, was fascinated by the suggestion, so that when Stephens and Catherwood returned to New York City with stories of their exploration, their book Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan was an overnight sensation. Their follow-up book, Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, chronicled their second trip and was equally praised.

When I began my journey, many of my friends discouraged me from following my dream. Drug trafficking had skyrocketed dramatically over the years, and violence had increased among the military and insurgent groups. Even the idea of a woman setting out on such an adventure was a folly to many of my colleagues and friends. Fortunately, I planned my trip carefully and engaged experienced drivers, guides, and interpreters. In fact, the approval and support of my drivers and guides proved to be a major asset in my venture.

That is not to say that I did not find myself in uncomfortable situations at one time or another, but that was not the norm. There was a time in the state of Vera Cruz, Mexico, where we were stopped by hooded federales. A machine gun mounted on a flatbed truck was pointed directly at me as I was ordered to exit the vehicle while it was searched for drugs. On another occasion I was surrounded by hooded, machine-gun-carrying federales in a hotel as I exited my room. Two of the police officers, concerned for my safety, escorted me to a private area until the police action was completed. It was rumored that a drug cartel kingpin had been cornered on the hotel rooftop.

There were many times during the trips that my driver and I were stopped, searched, and questioned by the military. In all of the time I spent in Mesoamerica, which would amount to approximately two years total, I never once feared for my life. I was treated with both kindness and respect by the

military. With each encounter, they voiced concern for my safety and repeatedly cautioned me to be careful. So unlike Stephens and Catherwood, I managed to freely explore the countries without arrest.

I came to appreciate the culture and the indigenous people as unique to this Earth. I was able to spend time in places without time constraints experienced by many travelers and researchers. Often when I established a base in a small village or hotel, people came to me with stories. They heard rumors of my work and wanted to verify that I was indeed collecting stories about UFOs. This occurred more often in Mexico than in the other countries I traveled. The more often I returned to a community, the more open the people became.

As I complete this book, there is one resounding fact that haunted me throughout my journey among the Maya: The Maya say that when they reached Mesoamerica, they brought their knowledge with them. This fact sets the Maya apart from other indigenous groups. A closer examination reveals that nowhere in the ancient stories of the Maya is there a declaration that they learned the secrets of civilization on Earth. They have no myths of great teachers or individuals who taught them how to live. They have no legends of gods coming from the west or the east, or from any other direction. So when the Spaniards arrived, the Maya did not welcome them with open arms. Instead they kept out of sight and hid in the jungle when the Spaniards came near them.

Unlike the Aztecs and other indigenous groups, the Maya clearly did not regard the Spaniards as "gods." I spoke with one elder Maya who told me the Maya did not view the Spaniards as technologically advanced. "We knew technologically advanced civilizations. We came from one. The Spaniards were not superior to us." To me, this statement speaks volumes and bolsters my view that the Maya were not assisted by aliens from space; they were the space travelers.

There is more that we do not know about the Maya than we know. We know they came to Mesoamerica in 3113 BCE, but it was not the starting point of their history, only their date of arrival in the region. Perhaps one day their true origin will be discovered. I, for one, consider myself fortunate to have walked where the ancients walked, to have followed in the footsteps of Stephens and Catherwood, and to have spent time with the indigenous people of today who still use and practice the knowledge of those who came long ago to Central America and Mexico. Even today, much of the ancient Maya kingdom remains unexplored. In the Chiapas, the Usumacinta River flows past innumerable

jungle-hidden cities that no archaeologist has yet uncovered. In the Yucatan Peninsula a myriad of overgrown temples, which I have personally observed, are unexcavated. The mountain highlands of Honduras and Guatemala are dotted with mounds and half-exposed structures. Like Stephens and Catherwood, there will be others who will examine these unknown cities and their secrets, in an attempt to learn more about the mysterious Maya. The lure of the unknown is irresistible.

During the course of my research, I walked among the indigenous people of Mesoamerica, shared their meals, joined family gatherings, participated in traditional ceremonies, shared events of merriment and misfortune, celebrated births, mourned the deceased, and listened to stories, both ancient and contemporary, about Sky Gods, Sky People, space travelers, aliens, and UFOs. I listened to encounters in which the individuals experienced rashes, unexplained marks, pregnancies and lost fetuses, and even healings. Some of the participants were left with a range of emotions, including fear, anger, awe, and wonder.

Others looked upon their experiences as normal, if not expected. One university-educated Maya historian told me, "Many of our elders say we are the Sky People. The world does not understand how the poor Maya subsistence farmer is the descendant of a highly intellectual, scientific society that built these ancient cities. They do not understand that all it takes is one cataclysmic event to change the course of history. Perhaps it was a killer hurricane, a tsunami, a meteor, a drought; but when such an event strikes and the familiar no longer exists, the only thing that matters is how to survive and take care of your family. That is the story of the Maya. We have been surviving ever since we arrived on planet Earth. We have survived invasion, wars, hurricanes, and volcanoes. We will survive the white man's theories. The important thing is, we know who we are."

Another Maya elder told me, "My grandfather told me that the Sky People came to Earth and stayed. They did not leave as some of the white men write. But catastrophe struck the great civilizations. We are what remain. We are the survivors. But be warned: All great civilizations collapse whether through war, famine, or a weather event. They all meet their end. Five thousand years from now a scientist may unearth the Statue of Liberty and speculate that she was the goddess of flame who brought fire to the world. I have seen your Statue of Liberty. I went to New York to the United Nations. You have many gods in New York City that the people will cling to if their world is destroyed,

but like the Maya, many survivors will choose not to remember."

Most likely, many forgotten civilizations have preceded us with their membership and attainments terminated by cataclysmic events. It may be that humanity's origins and history lie in the oral traditions of indigenous people and that we are all space travelers.

One of the purposes of my journey was to search for any credence in the theories about the ancient Maya that have been made by others before me, particularly the ancient astronaut theory. As a result of the time I spent among the Maya, I unequivocally reject this theory, but that does not mean that I do not believe that the Sky People visited Mother Earth throughout time; it is just the opposite. Whereas scientists discarded indigenous legends and stories of so-called primitive people as stories of superstitious people, this author believes that something happened to cause these legends to be created. In fact, I believe that the history of our Mother Earth, and that of our progenitors, has been recorded in legend, myth, and star lore, and that the indigenous people have a special connection with the stars.

I am also convinced that Sky People have visited Mother Earth and continue to do so and interact with the people of Earth. Originally, it appeared as though the visitors were ancestors as so many of the ancient and contemporary stories reveal. More recent stories indicate that perhaps the universe is becoming smaller and there are other entities visiting Earth that have no ancient connection with Earth or its people. Several of the stories I heard spoke of such events and brought warnings.

Since the 1940s the study of the UFO phenomenon has focused on the questions of whether UFOs are real, if their existence can be proven by the methods of traditional science, and whether or not people are being abducted by alien beings. Though these may be intriguing questions, I believe the most important truths lie in the extraordinary nature and power of the experiences of the individuals involved—in this case, the indigenous people of Mesoamerica. Their experiences should provide us with another dimension of reality, and what that means for the future of humanity. Instead of denouncing the subtle and elusive nature of the UFO phenomenon using an empirical approach, perhaps it is time we listen to those who experience these incidents.

Regardless of our position about the UFO phenomenon, I believe our interest in UFO encounters lies in the desire to recover the vital information and wisdom lost through turning away from traditional ways of knowing. In

Vine Deloria's book Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths, the Ogalala scholar presented the premise that science in general assumed superiority of thought over the collective memory of humans. The authority of truth once given to traditional wisdom was cast aside by the scientific community and regarded as myths and legends. If the evidence could not be explained scientifically, it was discarded. Today, if we listen to the stories of the indigenous people, both traditional and contemporary, we may find an ancient framework for those experiences that make them neither bizarre nor shocking. Being non-judgmental and open to other possibilities may lead to discoveries we have not yet considered.

Throughout the book I have allowed the voices of the indigenous people to convey the fact that the Sky People or space travelers were them. Their ancient cities are all that remains of the remarkable civilizations that utilized the energies of their cities to reflect the universe and to harness the energies of the sky.

Today, there are those Maya who maintain the old ways and continue to communicate with the ancestors and travel in time and space. For many, whether through abject loss of memory brought on by environmental catastrophes, the Maya are vulnerable human beings like the rest of us, living from day to day and surviving. As I walked among the Maya I could not help but feel I was in the presence of people who had far greater understanding of the universe than even the most respected scientists, while at the same time recognizing that much of what they know belongs to them and them alone.

Along the way, I learned secrets that indigenous people know but keep private. As I ponder those secrets, buried in the world of the Maya people and passed from one generation to another, I am reminded of something Rigoberta Menchú, the Guatemalan K'iche' Maya activist and Nobel Peace Prize recipient wrote in I, Rigoberta Menchú: "…I'm still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I'm still keeping what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets." Those secrets have been handed down for countless generations and define the people of Mesoamerica as indigenous.

As I interviewed the indigenous people of Mesoamerica who had personal encounters with UFOs and Sky People, I learned their traditional stories and their personal stories. I listened to their mysterious, mystical, spiritual experiences and otherworldly encounters and did not ask for evidence. Their

testimony was all I needed to believe in their trustworthiness. I made no assumptions and made no judgments.

In many cases, I was reminded of similar stories I had heard over the years. Missing time, fake pregnancies, physical examinations, abductions, and personal interaction with the Sky People were all stories that had been told by others. Among the people I met who told me their stories, I believe there is literal truth to the accounts. All the interviewees were remarkably sincere and had incredible stories to tell. Like other experiencers, some felt it was a violation and others thought it was the best thing that happened to them. But at its core, the stories that they told were pretty much the same. That consistency of people who do not know much about the phenomenon tell very similar stories to those who have been forthcoming with their encounters. Though not unique, the individuals I met had a sincerity about them that made their stories believable. It confirmed in my mind that something is definitely happening to the people of Earth, and the problem is not isolated, nor is it confined to one region of the planet.

At the conclusion of his exploration, Stephens insisted that the ruins he had investigated were those of a great, indigenous civilization born of an inherent genius apart from the influence of any other known group. I believe that Stephens' conclusions were far more prophetic than he realized. In spending countless days and weeks with the Maya, I am convinced they came to Earth. "The space men were us" was an expression I heard repeatedly. From my research, I believe the Maya of today are the descendants of those who came to Planet Earth from another world. They were not "assisted" by alien astronauts; they **were** the ancient astronauts.

Typical travel itinerary by the author.

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